

# State *Of the* State Survey

## *The Threat of Terrorism and Michigan Public Opinion*

*By:*

*Darren W. Davis, Ph.D.*

*Brian D. Silver, Ph.D.*

*Briefing Paper No. 2004-53*

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## Background

As part of its quarterly State of the State Survey (SOSS) of public opinion in Michigan, Michigan State University's (MSU) Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) began to monitor the impact of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), on Michigianians. Beginning in January 2002, a major focus of the survey questions has been on people's level of anxiety or sense of threat. In a project directed by MSU political science professors Darren Davis and Brian Silver, IPPSR also conducted two nationwide surveys on the impact of the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. World Trade Center and the Pentagon on people's support for civil liberties, which focused on whether people's sense of threat may affect their readiness to give up civil liberties for greater safety and security.

This paper reviews some of the central findings from the SOSS surveys in Michigan. Additional and related findings from the nationwide Civil Liberties Survey can be found online.<sup>1</sup> IPPSR's previous releases of major findings on this topic can also be found online.<sup>2</sup>

The data for this report are drawn from nine SOSS surveys conducted between January 11, 2002 and March, 11 2004.<sup>3</sup> Each survey includes the answers of approximately 1,000 Michigan residents to random-digit dialing (RDD) telephone surveys of approximately 20 minutes in length. The questions on terrorism analyzed here are only a small part of the questionnaires in each survey. The samples from each round are weighted to be representative of the adult population of Michigan. The sampling error for each survey is  $\pm 3.1$  to 3.2 percent.

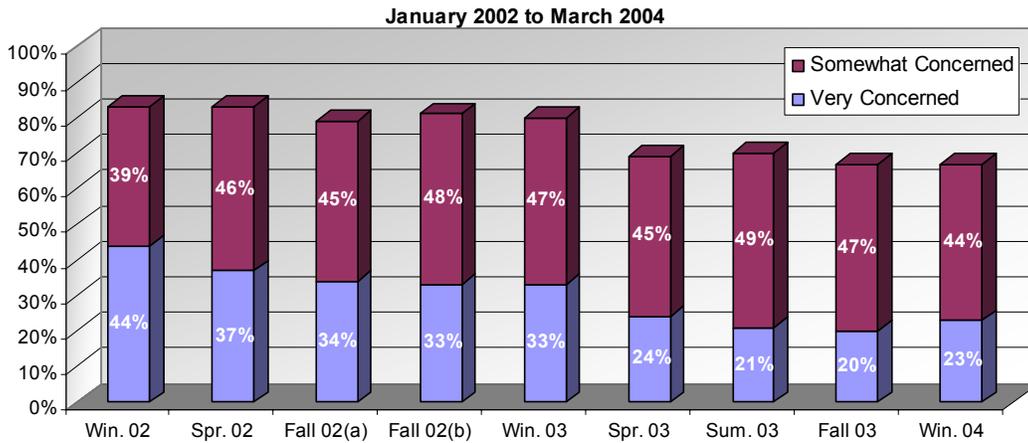
Further information about the survey samples and technical procedures can be obtained from the IPPSR website at [www.msu.edu/SOSS/SOSSdata.htm](http://www.msu.edu/SOSS/SOSSdata.htm).

## Concern about Another Terrorist Attack

Concern about another terrorist attack on the United States declined significantly in Michigan between January 2002 and March 2004, but remains high.

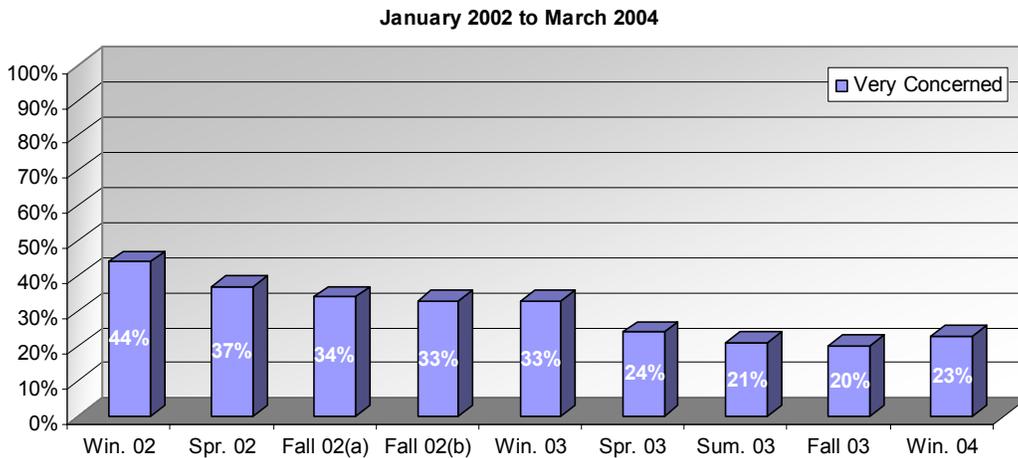
- In winter and spring of 2002, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, 83 percent of Michigan residents were "somewhat" or "very" concerned that another terrorist attack on the United States might occur in the next three months (Figure 1).
- Nearly as high a level of concern (about 80 percent) persisted through winter of 2003.
- Shortly after the fall of Baghdad to U.S. and coalition armed forces, however, the level of concern about terrorism in the United States began to decline. By March 2004, only two-thirds of Michigianians were concerned that another attack would occur in the next three months.
- The percentage of people who were "very" concerned about another terrorist attack shows a sharper decline. Whereas in winter 2002, 44 percent of Michigan residents were very concerned about another attack, after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 this percentage was cut in half and remained at this lower level through early March 2004 (Figure 2).

**Figure 1. Percent Somewhat or Very Concerned about a Terrorist Attack in the U.S. in the Next 3 Months**



Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned (as opposed to not very concerned or not at all concerned). From SOSS 24, 25, 27, through 33.

**Figure 2. Percent Very Concerned about a Terrorist Attack in the U.S. in the Next 3 Months**



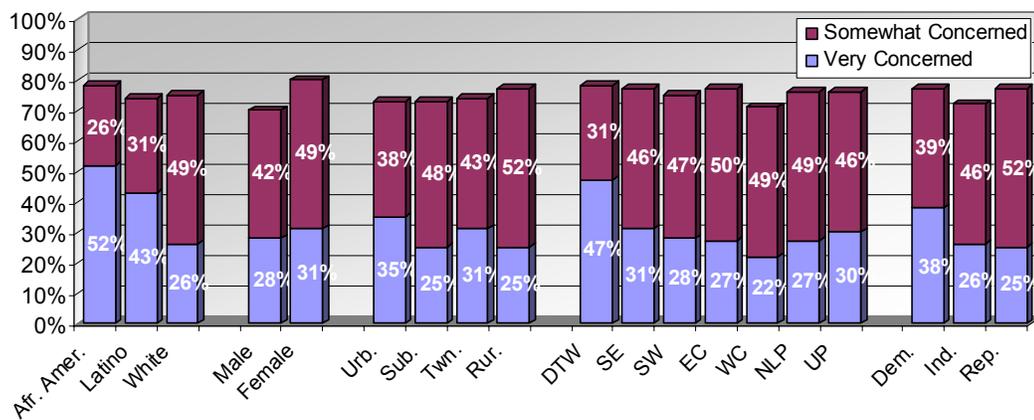
Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said they were very concerned (as opposed to somewhat concerned, not very concerned, or not at all concerned). From SOSS 24, 25, 27, through 33.

## Demographic Differences in Concern about Terrorism

- Based on data combined across several surveys, there was little variation in the level of concern about terrorism across Michigan's regions (Figure 3).
- Although overall racial and ethnic differences in the level of concern ("somewhat" or "very" concerned) were modest, African Americans (52 percent) and Latinos (43 percent) were much more likely to be "very" concerned than were Whites (26 percent). Thus, perceptions of serious threat differed greatly by race and ethnicity.
- Women (80 percent) were much more likely than men (70 percent) to express at least some concern about another attack, but the differences in being "very" concerned were small (31 percent versus 28 percent).

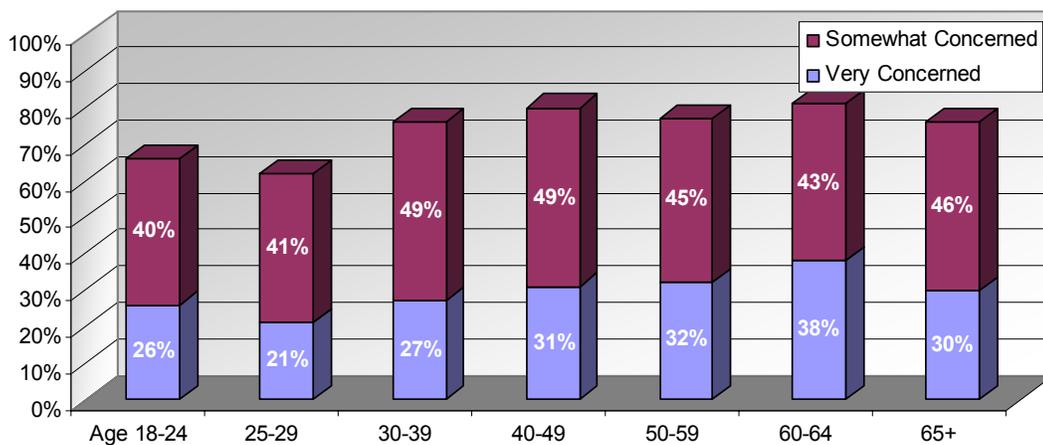
- Although regional differences were small overall, almost half (47 percent) of the population of Detroit was “very” concerned about another terrorist attack.
- Overall concern about terrorism differed little by political party identification, but Democrats (38 percent) were much more likely to be “very” concerned than were Republicans (25 percent).
- Young people (under age 30) were substantially less likely to be concerned about terrorism than middle-aged or older Michigianians (Figure 4).

**Figure 3. Percent Somewhat or Very Concerned about Another Terrorist Attack, by Social-Demographic Background**  
January 2002 to March 2004 rounds combined



Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned (as opposed to not very concerned or not at all concerned). From SOSS 24, 25, 27, through 33 combined.

**Figure 4. Percent Somewhat or Very Concerned about a Terrorist Attack, by Age**  
January 2002 to March 2004 rounds combined

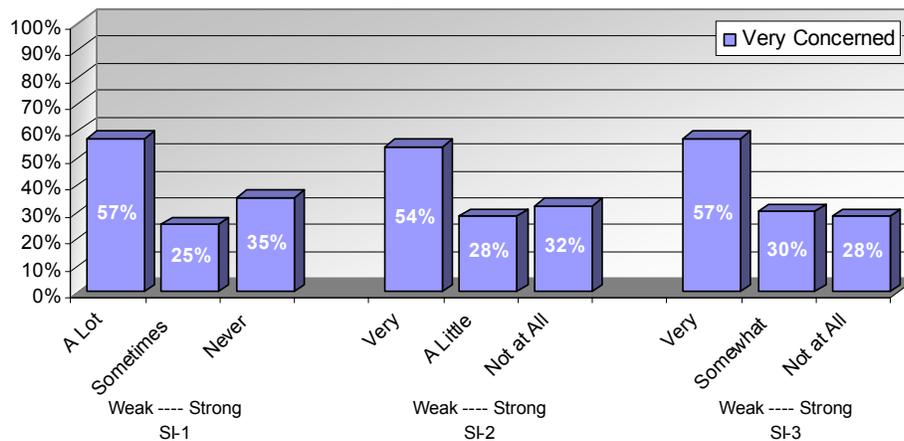


Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned (as opposed to not very concerned or not at all concerned). From SOSS 24, 25, 27, through 33 combined.

## Vulnerable Populations

While African Americans, Latinos, and women were more likely than average to be concerned about the threat of another attack, other potentially vulnerable populations could be identified by their psychological make-up. In particular, people who have a weak self-image – who describe themselves as jittery or as concerned when other people are evaluating them – were substantially more likely to express concern about a future terrorist attack. In a survey conducted in 2002 (Figure 5), majorities of people who had weak self images expressed concern about terrorism, compared to only one-third to one-quarter of other people.

**Figure 5. Self-Image and Percent Very Concerned about Another Terrorist Attack  
January to March 2003**



### Self-Image Questions (SOSS-29)

SI-1: How much do you worry about what people think of you, even when you know that what they think doesn't make any difference? A lot, a little, not at all?

SI-2: How tense or jittery are you if you know someone is sizing you up? Very tense, a little tense, or not at all tense?

SI-3: If you know people are forming an unfavorable impression of you, how concerned do you get? Very, somewhat, not concerned at all?

## Civil Liberties Trade-Offs

Since shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, one public policy question that has frequently been raised is in whether it is necessary to give up some individual liberties to the government in exchange for greater personal safety and security. In nationwide surveys, it has been shown that, on average, the public is fairly evenly divided on this issue

In spring 2002 (SOSS 25), this choice was posed to Michigianians in the State of the State Survey (CG3):

*Next I am going to read two statements. Please tell me which one you agree with most: The first is, in order to curb terrorism in this country, it will be necessary to give up some civil liberties. OR We should preserve our freedoms above all, even if there remains some risk of terrorism.*

- Michigianians supported the pro-civil liberties position by a slight majority: 52 to 46 percent, with two percent volunteering “it depends.” These percentages closely match the responses by the American population as a whole to the survey conducted between

mid-November 2001 and mid-January 2002: 54 percent were pro-civil liberties, 44 percent would give up civil liberties, and two percent said, “It depends.”

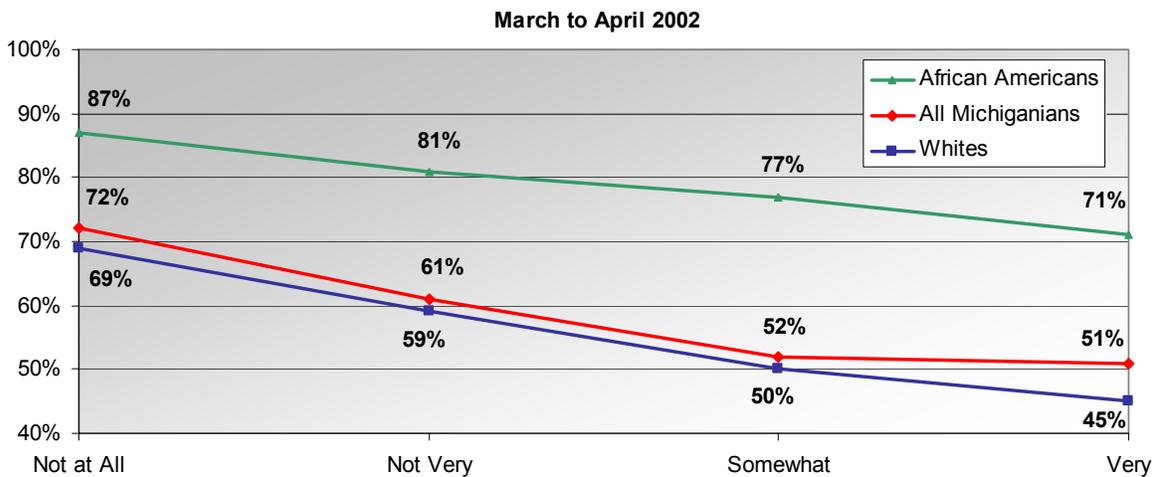
- Both in the nationwide survey and in Michigan, people’s concern about another terrorist attack affected their willingness to trade civil liberties for personal security. The greater people’s concern about terrorism, the more willing they were to give up some civil liberties for greater security.

As shown in Figure 6, for Michigianians as a whole, among those who said they were “not at all” concerned about another terrorist attack, 72 percent favored the pro-civil liberties position, while among those who said they were “very” concerned about another attack only 51 percent favored the pro-civil liberties position.

- This relationship also depended on the race of the individual. At every level of concern about the threat of terrorism, African Americans were substantially more likely to defend civil liberties than were Whites. In this sense, African Americans are strong defenders of the civil liberties in the context of the present national emergency. They do not cave in to their fears as readily as do Whites.

The national surveys show that these relationships hold over time: the results from the second wave of the national Civil Liberties Survey in winter 2003 were virtually identical to those of the first wave in late 2001/early 2002.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 6. Effect of Concern about Terrorist Threat on Support for Civil Liberties**



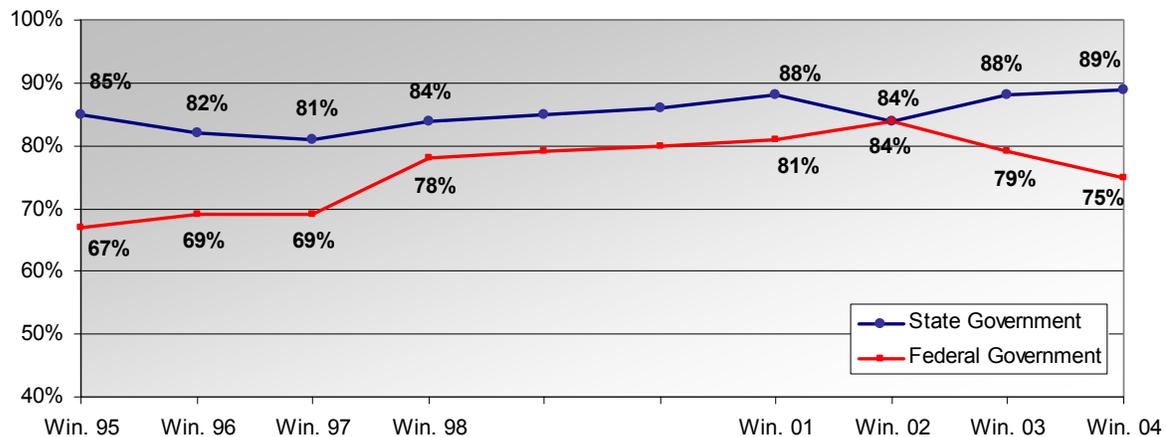
Note: The figures are the predicted percent in favor of preserving civil liberties, depending on the level of concern about another terrorist attack. From SOSS 25. The estimates control for the effects of political ideology, gender, and education.

## The Effects of 9/11 on Trust in Government

One well-documented effect of 9/11 on American public opinion was an immediate and strong rally-around-the-flag effect. Americans showed a sharp upsurge in national pride, confidence in the President, and trust in the national government. Figure 7 shows the long-term changes in trust in the government among Michigan residents between 1995 and 2004.

- Although trust in the federal government had begun an upward trend in 1997-98, it reached a peak in January-February 2002 – shortly after the 9/11 attacks. Since then, however, it has receded to the level found in the late 1990s. Thus, the rally effect of 9/11 on trust in the federal government appears to have been temporary.
- Trust in the Michigan state government, though noticeably higher than trust in the federal government at almost all survey dates, did not get an upward surge after 9/11. Whereas trust in the state government equaled trust in the federal government immediately after 9/11, trust in the state government is again substantially higher than trust in the federal government today.

**Figure 7. Trust in the Federal Government and in Michigan's State Government**  
**Percent who trust government some or most of the time**  
**1995 to 2004**



Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said they trust the government nearly always or most of the time, or some of the time (as opposed to seldom or never). From SOSS 2, 6, 10, 14, 20, 29, and 33.

## Perceptions of U.S. Responsibility for the Terrorist Attacks

The national survey probed popular attitudes about the root causes of the terrorist attacks.<sup>5</sup> Several international surveys conducted in Europe and other parts of the world both before and after 9/11 revealed negative attitudes toward American foreign policy. Some foreigners were even found to say that the United States “deserved what it got” from the 9/11 attacks. Investigators in the MSU surveys did not anticipate that many Americans would feel that way, but were interested in the extent to which Americans might think that U.S. foreign policy indirectly contributed to the hatred that motivated the terrorist attacks. Accordingly, investigators posed the following question both in their national and SOSS surveys:

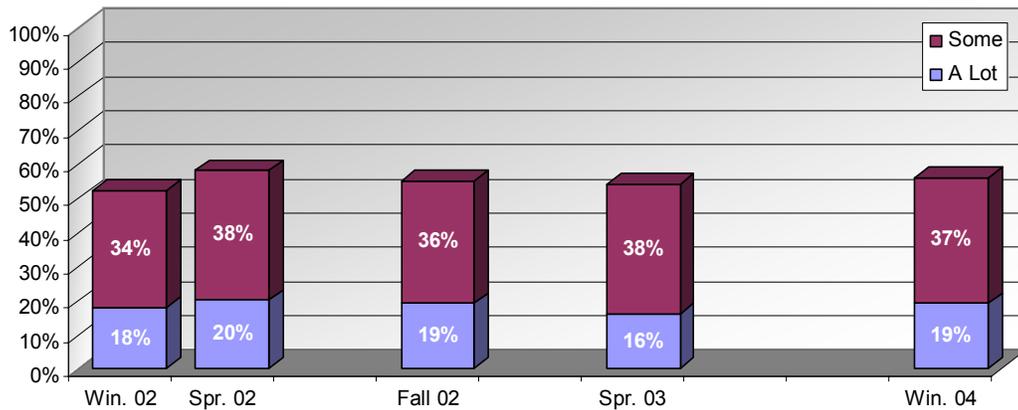
*How much responsibility do you personally believe the U.S. bears for the hatred that led to the terrorist attacks? Would you say a lot of responsibility, some, a little, or none at all?*

Surprisingly, the first national survey revealed that 55 percent of Americans thought that the United States bears “some” or “a lot” of responsibility for the hatred that led to the terrorist attacks. In further research, investigators found that the willingness to attribute such

responsibility to the United States was related to perceptions that the country had been acting unilaterally, whereas most people preferred that it act more cooperatively with other countries. In addition, people who regarded U.S. foreign policy as interventionist and more self-interested were more likely to attribute responsibility to the United States for the hatred that motivated terrorism.

Because the national survey results were so surprising, investigators attempted to replicate the main U.S. responsibility question in SOSS. Figure 8 shows the distribution of answers to this question in five SOSS rounds from January 2002 to March 2004. Across these surveys, between 52 and 58 percent of Michigan residents attributed at least some responsibility for the underlying hatred that motivated the terrorist attacks to the United States. The distributions of responses are highly consistent over time.

**Figure 8. Percent Saying the U.S. Bears Some or A Lot of Responsibility for the Hatred that Led to the Terrorist Attacks**  
January 2002 to March 2004



Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said the U.S. bears a lot or some responsibility (as opposed to very little or none at all). From SOSS 24, 25, 27, 30, and 33.

When demographic and political differences in perceptions of U.S. responsibility were examined by combining the results from the five surveys (Figure 9), there were highly differential responses by social background.

- Overall, 55 percent of Michigan residents attributed some or a lot of responsibility for the hatred that led to the attacks to the United States.
- While among Whites 52 percent attributed responsibility to the United States, among Latinos the figure was 59 percent and among African Americans it was 71 percent. The substantially higher percentages among these ethnic and racial minorities suggests that members of these groups tend to see U.S. international behavior in a much less positive light than does the White majority population. In the case of Latinos, the result may reflect an ability to see the United States as citizens of other countries might see it. In the case of African Americans, the result may reflect a tendency of a disaffected minority to see the U.S. government as oppressive, based on mistreatment of or discrimination against African Americans.

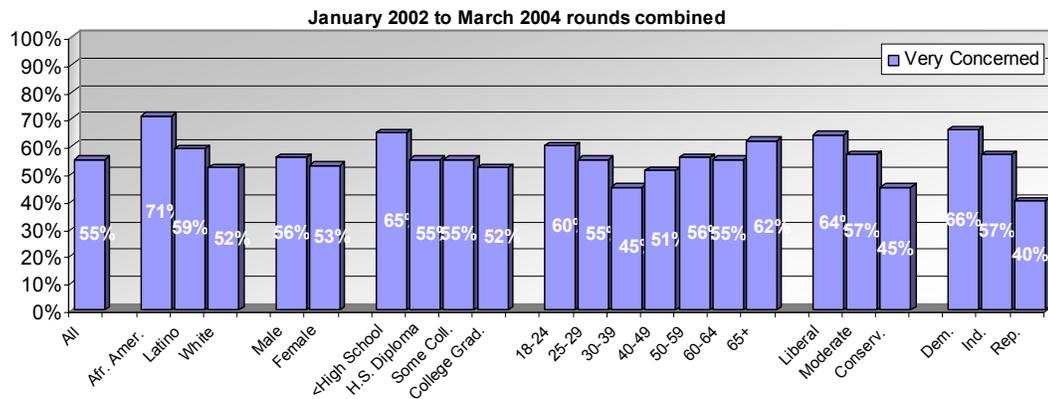
While (in other analyses) African Americans were no less patriotic or supportive of democratic ideals than Whites, even among people who perceive a strong threat of a future terrorist attack, they were nonetheless distrustful of the people in power. This is reflected in the fact that whereas on average in post-9/11 SOSS surveys 82 percent of Whites said that they trust the federal government to do what is right “some” or “most” of the time, only 65 percent of African Americans held such a view.

- While there were noticeable differences by gender, education, and age in the attribution of responsibility to the United States, more significant were the differences associated with political ideology and partisan identification.

While 57 percent of moderates and independents attributed “some” or “a lot” of responsibility to the United States, two-thirds of liberals and Democrats attributed “some” or “a lot” of responsibility to the United States.

Although less than half of conservatives and Republicans attributed responsibility to the United States, that these percentages were as high as they were (between 40 and 48 percent) was surprising. It is useful to bear in mind, however, that attribution of “responsibility for the hatred” may in many cases mean only that people think there was a cause-and-effect connection between U.S. policy and terrorism, not that the United States bears ultimate blame for the terrorist acts. For example, in the national MSU survey, investigators found that while a large majority of people saw a connection between U.S. support for Israel and the anger felt by terrorists, majorities of Americans in other surveys also believed that the United States ought to favor Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians.

**Figure 9. Percent Saying U.S. Bears Some or A Lot of the Responsibility for the Hatred that Led to the Terrorist Attacks, by Social-Demographic Background**



Note: Based on SOSS respondents who said U.S. bears a lot or some responsibility (as opposed to very little or none at all). The results are based on combining five waves of SOSS from Winter 2002 to Winter 2004. From SOSS 24, 25, 27, 30, and 33 combined.

## Concluding Remarks

Popular reactions to terrorism are driven as much by events as by peoples’ social backgrounds and political beliefs. Thus, the results reported here cannot be relied upon to forecast the future, but the evidence seems clear that there is also a politics of terrorism in the minds of Michigan’s citizens. It will therefore be of some interest to track key indicators through the remaining months of 2004 and beyond, as America’s policies in the area of

homeland security and anti-terrorism both at home and abroad have become issues in the Presidential election campaign. At the same time, it seems clear that continued sharp differences by race and ethnicity can be expected in perceptions of terrorism and of America's policies toward it.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For findings from the nationwide Civil Liberties Survey, see [www.msu.edu/~bsilver/CivLibPage.htm](http://www.msu.edu/~bsilver/CivLibPage.htm).

<sup>2</sup> For IPPSR's previous releases of major findings on this topic, see IPPSR Policy Brief (April 2002): "Americans Protect Civil Liberties" [www.ippsr.msu.edu/Publications/PBCivilLiberties.pdf](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/Publications/PBCivilLiberties.pdf)

IPPSR Media Information page (September 2003)  
[www.ippsr.msu.edu/AboutIPPSR/CivilLiberties.htm](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/AboutIPPSR/CivilLiberties.htm)

Gisgie Gendreau, *MSU Today* (9/15/2003): "People remain willing to trade civil liberties for safety, security"  
[msutoday.msu.edu/research/index.php3?article=12Sep2003-5](http://msutoday.msu.edu/research/index.php3?article=12Sep2003-5)

<sup>3</sup> The last interview for this study was completed on March 11, 2004, the day before the terrorist bombing in Madrid.

<sup>4</sup> For comparisons of results from the two waves of the national survey, see [www.msu.edu/~bsilver/ContinuityAPSA2003.pdf](http://www.msu.edu/~bsilver/ContinuityAPSA2003.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> For a research report focusing on this issue, see [www.msu.edu/~bsilver/RootsMarch25-Final.pdf](http://www.msu.edu/~bsilver/RootsMarch25-Final.pdf).

## About SOSS

The State of the State Survey (SOSS) is a statewide survey conducted by the Office for Survey Research at Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR). Administered quarterly, SOSS provides current information about citizen opinions on critical issues such as education, the environment, health care, crime, victimization and family violence, giving and philanthropy, governmental institutions, and specific community concerns.

SOSS surveys are based on stratified random samples of adults age 18 and older living in Michigan. The sample strata are based on the regions, as detailed below, established by Michigan State University Extension, with one exception: Detroit City is treated as a separate region. The data sets include "weights" to adjust the data so that they are representative of the adult population of Michigan. More information about SOSS, including codebooks and methodological reports for each round, are available online at [www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS](http://www.ippsr.msu.edu/SOSS).

### Regional Categories

<b>Detroit:</b>	City of Detroit
<b>East Central:</b>	Arenac, Bay, Clare, Clinton, Gladwin, Gratiot, Huron, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw, Sanilac, Shiawassee, Tuscola
<b>Northern L.P.:</b>	Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Iosco, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Missaukee, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Otsego, Oscoda, Presque Isle, Roscommon, Wexford
<b>Southeast:</b>	Genesee, Lapeer, Lenawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Wayne (excluding Detroit)
<b>Southwest:</b>	Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, Van Buren
<b>U.P.:</b>	Alger, Baraga, Chippewa, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Keweenaw, Luce, Mackinac, Marquette, Menominee, Ontonagon, Schoolcraft
<b>West Central:</b>	Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Ottawa

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