Introduction

THE TERRORIST attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon carried out by al-Qaeda operatives on September 11, 2001, were shattering events. They fueled widespread anger, a desire for revenge, and a new sense of threat and vulnerability among most Americans. Powerful and deep-seated responses coincided with unprecedented, blanket media coverage of the attacks in the days following 9/11. This coverage featured seemingly endless loops of planes crashing into buildings, speculation about the source of the attacks and the possibility of further terrorist activity, and news conferences in which political leaders vowed revenge. One day after the attacks, a *New York Times* editorial referred to the specter of "more lethal nuclear, biological or chemical attacks by terrorists," arguing that "this cannot be just another moment when the president declares that the United States is unbreakable. . . . It must be the occasion for a fundamental reassessment of intelligence and defense activities" ("The War Against America: The National Defense," September 12, 2001).

The response of the Bush administration and Congress was rapid and far-reaching. At a press conference just days after 9/11, President George W. Bush announced that America was facing "a new kind of evil," and CNN reported that the administration anticipated a new war on terror that could "take years" ("Administration Predicts the Fight Will Take Years," *CNN Online*, September 16, 2001). Referring to the American public, a *Time* magazine article proclaimed that "if ever there was a time when they might be receptive to trimming their accustomed freedoms, that time is now. And whether they are receptive or not, the changes have already begun" (Richard Lacayo, Andrew Goldstein, Chris Taylor, and Elizabeth Bland, "Terrorizing Ourselves," September 24, 2001). Under the leadership of Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the Bush administration began preparations for war, first in Afghanistan and later in Iraq.

On the home front, a wide-ranging policy response to the attacks

quickly unfolded. Measures such as the Patriot Act, in conjunction with newly implemented electronic intelligence-gathering and surveillance programs, vastly expanded the domestic reach of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA). Abroad, a dramatic increase in military special operations and covert CIA actions included the seizure—or "rendition"—of terrorism suspects without due process, the use of torture to extract information, and targeted killings of specific individuals.

There can be no question that the new counterterrorism laws and policies adopted by the federal government in the wake of the September 11 attacks had major impacts on American society and politics. Legal scholars have noted that these policies altered long-standing interpretations of the Constitution, generating new debates surrounding America's relationship to international human rights agreements (American Bar Association 2003; Cole and Dempsey 2006). To this point, post-9/11 counterterrorism policies have largely survived the transition from Republican congressional majorities during the presidency of George W. Bush to Democratic congressional majorities established after 2006 through 2010, and the presidency of Barack Obama. They appear poised to become lasting institutional features of American government.

A quick examination of the most important of these policies attests to their importance. Consider first the 2001 Patriot Act. Signed into law forty-five days after the attacks, the Patriot Act enables law enforcement agencies to more readily obtain phone, email, and financial data. In doing so, the act significantly weakens the protections created by the Fourth Amendment's prohibition on unlawful search. Before its passage, for instance, agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation were required to obtain court warrants for searches and provide documentation to the accused. The Patriot Act's "sneak and peak" provisions dispensed with this protection, making it unnecessary to establish probable cause as a precondition to the surveillance of individual suspects.

The Patriot Act presents a new trade-off on a second constitutional protection. The act's broad definition of terrorism appears to have unintentionally facilitated the wider use of ethnic profiling. After the 9/11 attacks, the mere suspicion of a connection to terrorism, or even immigration violations, was enough to prompt interviews and aggressive requests for information by law enforcement agencies. In this way, the Patriot Act butts up against the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection. According to some observers, traveling, studying, or doing a charitable activity while Arab or Muslim has become a new source of discrimination and political suspicion.

Also emerging in the wake of the 9/11 attacks were contentious, de facto practices adopted by the CIA that departed from international agreements and laws. Stung by sharp criticism from government offi-

cials of having failed to anticipate the threat posed by Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization, the CIA embarked on a broad new course of paramilitary activities. Terrorism suspects numbering in the thousands were apprehended by U.S. operatives in a manner that bracketed the array of established international legal protections. By circumventing due process rights to hear charges and have access to legal representation, the CIA's new practice of rendition bypassed United States, European Union, and international law. Some terrorism suspects were transferred to third-party country governments, some of which were known to routinely torture political prisoners. More frequently, they were detained indefinitely in a network of secret prisons located outside the United States and operated by the CIA. The largest facilities were located at Bagram Air Base in Kabul, Afghanistan, and at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. But other detention centers, including a number of more secret "black sites," were also created for special "high-value" targets.

In 2004, journalists unearthed evidence of the use by American government operatives at the Abu Ghraib prison facility in Iraq of what was euphemistically described as enhanced interrogation techniques. These included the use of repeated beatings, exposure to extreme cold and sleep deprivation, and the near-death experience induced by waterboarding. The release of photographs highlighting the treatment and torture of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison provided a visual record of some of these practices, and others were recorded on videotapes that would later be—illegally—destroyed.

Other contentious counterterrorism policies and practices continued to emerge well after the initial shock of the 9/11 attacks. The Bush administration decided soon after 9/11 that many detainees would be tried in military courts, a decision that the Supreme Court would strike down in 2006, on grounds that the use of those courts had not been authorized by Congress. Shortly thereafter, however, the Congress passed, and President Bush signed into law, the Military Commissions Act. This act authorized the use of military courts for trying accused terrorism suspects, effectively limiting Sixth Amendment rights to a jury trial for individuals classified as "enemy combatants," and gave a degree of after-the-fact legalization to the due process and habeas corpus violations associated with the CIA's rendition and detention activities. It also codified the power of the government to try terrorism suspects in secret courts not subject to normal rules of evidence and procedure.

A different and particularly wide-ranging counterterrorism activity involves the growing use of electronic surveillance. After President Bush secretly lifted a ban on domestic spying, the National Security Agency moved swiftly to collect millions of electronic communications involving American citizens as well as foreign nationals. NSA spying within the United States was initially warrantless, bypassing a 1978 law requir-

ing government operatives to apply for court approval. These surveillance activities would later be given retroactive authorization by the passage of the 2008 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Amendments Act. According to a variety of investigative reports, email and phone communications, banking, even web browsing have become far more subject to collection by government agencies (Bamford 2008; Lichtblau 2008; Risen and Lichtblau 2009).

On their own, each of these new policies and government actions related to the war on terror have been important. Collectively, they have spiraled into an open-ended search for terrorism suspects, directly affecting the lives and liberties of thousands, and even millions in the case of electronic surveillance. Remarkably, however, few viable suspects have been unearthed through these searches. As we note in more detail in chapter 1, evidence indicates that when plots have been uncovered and convictions obtained, they appear to have resulted from traditional law enforcement methods. In an era of large government budget deficits, the economic costs of these programs also appear to be substantial.[1]

To put the issues into sharper focus, the results of scholarship and reporting concerning the risks posed by terrorism are useful. According to this literature, war on terror policies appear to be premised on an exaggerated view of threat. Surprisingly, the evidence suggests that terrorism does not appear to pose a large risk to life. Even in the unusual context of 2001 and the 9/11 attacks, the risk of dying from terrorism in the United States was just one in 101,000 (Mueller and Stewart 2010). That contrasts with the dramatically higher risks in that year of homicide death (one in 22,000), dying in a traffic accident (one in 8,000), and cancer-related fatalities (one in 540). In this same year, bathtub drownings (one in 79,000) posed a far greater risk to American lives than Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda did. Since 9/11, al-Qaeda attacks outside war zones have killed few Americans (Mueller 2006).[2]

Complementary and equally surprising evidence has come from some counterterrorism officials. According to Michael Sheehan, assistant secretary of defense for special operations, "Al-Qaida wasn't as good as we thought they were on 9/11. . . . Everyone looked to the skies every day after 9/11 and said, 'When is that next attack?' And it didn't come, partly because al-Qaida wasn't that capable. They didn't have other units here in the U.S. . . . Really, they didn't have the capability to conduct a second attack" (Tilghman 2012).

In the face of this evidence concerning the absolute and relative risks posed by international terrorism, counterterrorism policies and practices have emerged as a transformation of American constitutional law and practice. They create an important new set of conflicts between rights protections and national security imperatives, placing limits on long-established domestic and international human rights protections. In

doing so, they have dramatically expanded the coercive capacities of U.S. government agencies. They raise the possibility of further and potentially unpredictable uses by American presidents in the future.

Why Public Opinion?

This book examines the political sources and consequences of the war on terror through the lens of public opinion. We look at the attitudes and beliefs of ordinary Americans. We want to better understand when and why Americans have gone along with or actively embraced these policies, and where they may draw the line on what the federal government is allowed to do in the name of fighting terrorism.

Some critical observers of American politics, not to mention a number of our fellow social scientists, may be skeptical that much can be learned about the post-9/11 era and the new war on terror through a focus on mass opinion. If, for instance, readers doubt that there is anything of weight or real substance in the public's attitudes, they may be skeptical about the rationale and ultimate payoff behind our efforts. We hope throughout the rest of the book to provide material for skeptics to rethink a categorical dismissal of policy opinions among the public. For now, however, we want to briefly outline why we expect, indeed why we are compelled to believe, that mass public opinion deserves careful scrutiny if we are to gauge the full significance and relevant dynamics of the post-9/11 war on terror.

Elsewhere we have written at some length on the evidence that public policies are often affected by public opinion (compare Manza and Cook 2002; Brooks and Manza 2007; Manza and Brooks 2012). Our evaluation of that evidence, our own and others' (for example, Stimson, Mackuen, and Erikson 1995; Burstein 1998, 2003; Gilens 1999; Wlezien and Soroka 2010), leads us to the conclusion that public attitudes are frequently, but by no means always, an important determinant of government policy. Sometimes the influence of public opinion is direct—as when elected officials act preemptively in response to public preferences—or indirect, as when voters' attitudes on important issues influence election outcomes. Our conclusions do not mean that other factors—such as political institutions, elite and mass mobilizations, media discourses, and the legacies of past policies—do not also influence policymaking processes. Certainly the relationship between opinion and policy is a probabilistic one; opinion does not determine policy, but much more often than never the public gets policies closer to what majorities prefer, and few policies are sustained over long periods in the face of strong and mobilized public opposition. Persistently unpopular policies are perhaps like a door that is off the hinges; all it takes is a bit of a push and it will fall right over.[3]

To this point, then, our general expectation is that where public opinion is visible to democratically elected politicians, they will tend to respond, even if unevenly and sometimes only indirectly. Almost immediately, we can see the fruitfulness of this position, for it compels us to raise key questions and face central puzzles. If, indeed, Americans did not want new constraints on rights and liberties to be set in place after 9/11, why did counterterrorism policies persist and even expand over time? Alternatively, perhaps the public actually prefers these policies?

Still, the idea that public opinion and policy can be connected one way or another remains controversial. A quick review of what other scholars have said about public opinion will show a pair of objections commonly made against such conclusions.

First, some analysts believe that public opinion is simply too whimsical or easily manipulated by political elites to be worthy of much study. Given their privileged access to the mass media, political elites are capable of shaping the way people think about important policy questions. Mass opinion thus has no "independent" effect on policy outcomes.

In the case of the war on terror, or national security issues more generally, it has sometimes been argued that most Americans simply do not have sufficiently detailed knowledge of the policy issues in question (in this case, the kinds of counterterrorism measures under consideration) to reason about and form stable opinions that are measurable through surveys and alternative methods of data collection. One response to such arguments is that critics of public opinion conflate individual-level instability—that is, actual individuals may be confused, ignorant, or easily manipulated—with aggregate public opinion. But it is aggregate public opinion that frequently matters for politicians and policymakers, as it is generally in the aggregate that policy preferences are read by policymakers.

But aggregate opinion is meaningful to study for other reasons. In the aggregate, individual-level randomness tends to average out. The miracle of aggregation, as it is sometimes called, arises from the fact that sometimes people will mistakenly respond to a survey question one way or the other, but unless errors go disproportionately in one direction, they will tend to average out. Examining aggregate mass opinion is thus informative even when randomness is rife among a majority of individuals.

We also think that the case for a more analytically optimistic view of the mass public when it comes to even complicated foreign policy and counterterrorism questions is a good one. An important review of opinion research by John Aldrich and his colleagues (2006) delivers a thematic result for skeptics: the best evidence suggests foreign policy attitudes are no less real or reflective of prior beliefs and reasoning than domestic policy attitudes. Americans tend to have plenty of initial convictions as regards matters such as the appropriate use of military force,

globalization, and international agreements and treaties, and these is-sues also have considerable salience for the public. This doesn't mean, of course, that these beliefs and dispositions are unalterable or insulated from further thought and interaction with environmental stimuli. But it does suggest an initial and nontrivial baseline and set of initial inclina-tions among voters. In concrete settings, it is precisely these dispositions that are the raw material, interacting with politicians' communications and other environmental stimuli, out of which public opinion emerges.

From this perspective, it should not be particularly surprising that counterterrorism measures may be salient and draw from deeply held beliefs and emotional responses among ordinary Americans. In retro-spect, it would be rather shocking if this were not the case. In addition to the 9/11 attacks and accompanying media coverage (Nacos, Block-Elkon, and Shapiro 2011), relevant stimuli relating to counterterrorism policies since then include the following: "orange" threat levels; pat-downs and full-body scans at U.S. airports; and the specter of foreign-trained, home-grown, and even underwear-loaded bomb suspects at times dominating the mass media and public discussions.

A second argument against public opinion offers a distinct but no less skeptical conclusion. Many social scientists, particularly in our own dis-cipline of sociology, are doubtful that public policy, especially foreign policy, is informed by public opinion at all, regardless of whether public opinion exists. The argument here is that the role of powerful actors op-erating behind the scenes, as it were, is key to understanding political outcomes. These actors may be powerful because of the money they con-tribute to the political system, the network ties that bind them together with elected officials, or their direct influence with government officials and political party leaders. These beyond-closed-doors arguments could seem especially powerful in the case of national security policies, which are frequently shrouded in secrecy and where policy decisions are only revealed after the fact, for example, through the work of investigative journalists.

We do not doubt the importance of such actors in shaping policy in general, and national security policies in particular. But this does not mean that mass opinion is irrelevant to policy or even to policymakers. The potential impact of public opinion on government decisions about such questions as military intervention or foreign policies affecting American citizens is apparent in memoirs and studies of presidents and their inner-circle advisors. Presidents and other political elites devote considerable effort to trying to understand public opinion through in-house polling, and to manipulate it. We might ask, accordingly, why politicians and other organized actors ever try to understand or influ-ence public opinion if it is meaningless, or whether other factors are all that matter?

In this regard, the work of Aldrich and his colleagues (2006) is again telling. They amass evidence that linkages between mass public opinion and the government's national security policies are often substantial (see also Foyle 1999; Sobel 2001). For example, according to the famous rally-around-the-flag thesis, voters can be expected respond predictably and favorably to U.S. presidents when wars or military conflict break out. But with the passage of time and an increase in casualties, government policies come under scrutiny from an impatient and readily dissatisfied public who may seek to recall and punish a sitting president or the incumbent's party at the next election (see also Mueller 1970, 2006). It would be difficult to rule out the relevance of these process in the post-9/11 era, and indeed evidence precisely to this effect exists (Schubert, Stewart, and Curran 2002; Campbell 2006). Far from being irrelevant to understanding the dynamics and consequences of the war on terror, what Americans think and believe looks to be critical.

Coming to Terms with the Dark Side of Public Opinion

If there is a compelling case for taking public opinion seriously, why would there ever be any reflexive skepticism on the part of some scholars and nonscholars? Here we can only offer a conjecture, albeit one that we probe in more detail in the chapters that follow. It goes like this. *The attitudes and beliefs of Americans have a dark side, a willingness to suppress otherwise strong support for civil rights and liberties in the name of national crisis and perceived threats.* Vigorous supporters of rights and liberties may not like it, but this "dark side" of public opinion has, we argue in chapter 1, deep roots in American political culture. The dark side is far from being a permanent condition, but it can be activated under the right conditions, and its impacts are magnified when threats come from unpopular social groups that elicit suspicion or resentment.

History suggests that it is in times of crisis or political contention that the activation of this less-than-liberal side of the American public is most likely to surface. Indeed, this is precisely what has often animated many of the more analytically challenging and normatively provocative episodes of public opinion research in the past (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982; Stouffer 1992; Kinder and Sanders 1996). The case of the war on terror and post-9/11 counterterrorism policies may represent a similar, new case. Part of the task of this book is to explore this scenario and the light it sheds on the post-9/11 era.

Why Rights? Why Counterterrorism?

Before the 2001 attacks, a remarkable array of social theorizing suggested the seemingly inexorable march of human rights ideas around the globe.

In the United States, the civil rights and subsequent protest movements of the 1960s were said to have ignited a "rights revolution," presided over by new cadres of progressive experts and activist judges and increasingly entrenched in both political institutions and public opinion (Epp 1998; Skrentny 2002; Ignatieff 2007). An earlier body of scholarship had powerfully documented Americans' increasingly liberal attitudes toward First Amendment liberties and ethnic and racial diversity (Wilson 1994; Marcus et al. 1995; Schuman et al. 1997). On the global scene, international governmental and nongovernmental organizations were seen as sponsoring "world society" norms and international treaties based on individual liberties, rationality, and scientific expertise (Boli and Thomas 1997; Meyer et al. 1997; Frank, Hironaka, and Schofer 2000). Everywhere scholars looked, it seemed that democracy was expanding, dictators were being called to task for human rights violations, and war crimes tribunals were pursuing investigations and making cases against warlords and rogue nation-states.

The overall impression conveyed by these developments is one of steady movement toward ever greater recognition of human and civil rights. What of the war on terror? As regards public responses, the initial conclusion of some opinion researchers was that there was no evidence of any real decline in rights support among the American public. But for a slight dip in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Americans continued to endorse positions that would have pleased most of the Founding Fathers. According to the most comprehensive study, "Americans have not shown a penchant for tolerating restrictions on their freedom and civil liberties. . . . Over time, citizens became more protective of civil liberties than concerned about their security" (Davis 2007, 219).

But as we get further and further away from 9/11, such conclusions leave us with a puzzle. What if high levels of rights support in principle did not preclude favorable views of counterterrorism policies? Could this also be a feature of the post-9/11 era? For the most part, questions such as this go beyond the scope of much of the earlier rights-centered scholarship in the public opinion field. There is little doubt among scholars that Americans tended to view ideas of rights and liberties with favor in the 1990s, and, after an initial dip in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, would continue to do so. But with a decade's worth of hindsight, the assessments of initial scholarship and the long-standing trajectory of public opinion research do not seem to provide enough of a vantage point for getting at the realities of the contemporary era.

Scholars are now beginning to explore in more detail this new reality. We describe these efforts in more detail in chapter 2, but it is useful to highlight three key possibilities that provide a point of departure for this book. One powerful and dissenting interpretation emphasizes the susceptibility of Americans to threat manipulation (Merolla and Zechmeis-

ter 2009). When primed by politicians or the media to think about terrorism threats, individuals cope by shifting their preferences regarding what they want out of political leaders and public policy. In contrast to claims about their existential nature, terrorist threats need not be real to have powerful effects. Indeed, political leaders may actively manipulate threats to their advantage. Evidence demonstrates the recurrent use of terrorist threats in presidential communications in the media buttress post-9/11 policies.

A second view suggests an even more lasting foundation, not just with how Americans cope in a threat-laden environment, but in what the public already believes. The thrust of this second line of thinking emphasizes the central role of ethnocentrism in shaping attitudes toward the war on terror (Kam and Kinder 2007; Kinder and Kam 2009). Here, lasting attachments and identifications associated with social groups are central, and ethnicity is preeminent. In the post-9/11 era, the sense of "us versus them" is said to dispose the American public, particularly whites, to endorsing punitive and bellicose policies. Survey evidence reveals that after 2001, a measure of ethnocentrism predicts the public's preferences on a variety of policy-attitude items, including the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, spending on defense and the war on terrorism, and border control. Pushing the ethnocentrism thesis further is the possibility that other, even more encompassing definitions of outsiders underlie support for coercive, counterterrorism policies (Sides and Gross 2011).

A third and final set of ideas emerges from historically oriented scholars who have called attention to a different sort of us-versus rhetoric relating to national identity as a driver of public support for strong counterterrorism policies (Hutcheson et al. 2004; McCartney 2004; Lieven 2005). Nationalism and national identity status, separate from ethnocentrism, may provide a motivation for citizens to embrace post-9/11 policies. In this case, people with a stronger identity with America would be more likely to be positive about the country's direction in fighting terrorism. This also raises a set of questions about whether perceptions of the national origins of policy targets are a factor in the formation of attitudes.

Public Opinion and Path Dependence

Like any important policy innovation, counterterrorism policy—and public attitudes toward it—may become subject to path-dependent processes that tend to lock in those developments. Path dependency arises when particular kinds of rules or arrangements develop their own subsequent momentum. Path dependency is common in many arenas of social life. The degree of equal opportunity legislation and the use of majoritarian versus proportional representation rules in democracies are

two dramatic examples, ones that also illustrate the remarkable variety of such processes.

An example that highlights the historical particularities of path dependency can be seen in the case of the QWERTY keyboard. Established in the context of the nineteenth century to reduce the occurrence of keys jamming, QWERTY is far less optimal in later historical contexts, where mechanical keys have been replaced by electronic technology. But, once established, QWERTY has proven impossible to dislodge despite numerous attempts to do so. A subtle feature of path dependency, as the case of the QWERTY keyboard suggests, is that it can persist in spite of inefficient or even perverse impacts (David 1985).

In the study of public policy, path dependence provides analytical leverage for understanding how developments at one time may come to shape what is possible at other times. Paul Pierson (1993, 2000) has advanced the claim that path dependence is likely because key constituencies form around a newly adopted policy and fight to maintain it in more or less its original form over time. Furthermore, important policy developments typically alter the context within which political contests take place, advantaging certain kinds of strategies and proposals and disadvantaging others, particularly those that argue for a model that departs from the now-established policy regime.

Another key source of path dependence in politics is that once adopted, policies may become popular with citizens and voters, so that they become entrenched or even simply taken-for-granted features of social and political life. In the area of U.S. social policy, we would point to Social Security and Medicare as examples of social policies that have become sufficiently entrenched in the public mind that efforts to substantially modify or even tinker with them tend to meet with sharp public backlash. Why do policies become popular after they are adopted? Sometimes it is because, as for Social Security or Medicare, large numbers of citizens benefit from the program and gain an interest-enhanced legitimacy. But other explanations are also possible, as, for example, when a policy or program mobilizes beliefs and convictions to which individuals already subscribe. Could coercive counterterrorism measures have activated authoritarian values or a pattern of antipathy toward key target groups on the part of citizens? If so, politicians may have new grounds for expansion. Even those with reservations may be reluctant to tamper with popular policies, fearing electoral reprisals if they do so.

Just how deeply entrenched and path dependent post-9/11 counterterrorism laws and policies ultimately prove to be remains to be seen. In the rest of this book, we first gauge the magnitude of and the mechanisms undergirding public support for the new counterterrorism policies and measures. But, at the outset, we note that if our hunches about the impact of public opinion on policy are correct, and if a process of

path dependence has now garnered popular support for new counterterrorism measures, their persistence becomes more likely.

The Plan of This Book

As we look at scholarship on counterterrorism and public attitudes, we see a rich field with a diverse array of theoretical perspectives that increasingly outstrip the available empirical evidence with which to resolve fundamental questions and controversies. In this study, we draw on three nationally representative surveys we conducted in 2007, 2009, and 2010. Each includes a range of survey experiments we have developed to explore various aspects of public support for counterterrorism. In our examination of these experiments, we probe the underlying beliefs and considerations that shed light on when and why Americans extend support to counterterrorism policies. The findings and results that emerge from our surveys may be surprising to some, pointing as they do to a mix of established as well as more novel biases that operate in the contemporary era. We also want to see just how malleable, or locked in, mass opinion ultimately is. That is a challenge that matters for democratic theory and practice, and our experiments provide perspective.

Our exploration of a darker side of U.S. opinion starts from, and calls for, situating it within the broader, historical context. The long history of domestic countersubversion, including campaigns against Native Americans, immigrants, socialists, communists, and civil rights activists, is a key part of the American political heritage. We discuss this history in chapter 1, noting how the rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s appeared to render the long history of intrusive surveillance and repression of perceived enemies, foreign and domestic, as a thing of the past. But, if initially unexpected, the post-9/11 turn suggests a remarkable retreat back to an older era in the balance between rights and liberties versus national security claims and imperatives.

Complementing the historical background outlined in chapter 1, American public opinion in the post–World War II era also appeared to have shifted toward strong support for civil liberties and greater freedom from government surveillance or rights abridgment. In chapter 2, we consider such assessments of opinion liberalization, alongside the alternative scenario that people are instead vulnerable to bracketing rights support in the face of new perceptions of threat. We also consider theoretical approaches emphasizing stronger predispositional bases, stemming either from patterns of group identification or from prior beliefs about the group targets of policy. We summarize how and why competing theories differ in regard to causal mechanisms behind public responses and policy reasoning, and we indicate how our research questions provide leverage.

Chapter 3 introduces the first big empirical question: how, if at all, have public attitudes and responses to counterterrorism policies changed? The 2007 to 2010 period covered by our surveys is fortuitous. This is a critical era, spanning a widely discussed shift in political party control over the U.S. presidency and a deepening Democratic majority in Congress. If an explanation based on partisan reasoning is anywhere close to the mark, we should see clear evidence of over-time and between-group patterns of polarization based on partisanship. But as we will see, this is not what the data show. Instead, there are very few trends. That tells us that the 9/11 policy legacy is anchored in forces beyond partisan reasoning.

Beginning in chapter 4, we turn to an analysis of our survey experiments to explore the structure and complexity of Americans' attitudes more closely. We begin by asking whether threats and the national targets of counterterrorism policies matter to the formation of attitudes. Are these simply two sides of the same factor, or different forces in their own right? Results of our experiments provide dramatic evidence that the national identity target groups matters. Evidence indicates that this is also a quite different force than terrorism threat. That lends momentum to our initial hunches, and, more subtly, the results also shed light on the degree and source of malleability in U.S. counterterrorism attitudes.

Chapter 5 builds on the findings. We want to bring ethnocentrism into proper consideration to broaden our investigation of identity targets. We offer a contrasting and accompanying set of experiments into patterns of sentiment toward established versus more novel types of outsider groups. It is groups such as "Muslims," "foreigners," and "people of Middle Eastern background" that elicit particularly negative attitudes. Our experiments tell us how these distinctions influence policy reasoning. Especially important is whether the key cleavage on counterterrorism involves the national identity origin of target groups, or instead their identities with respect to an underlying dimension of transnational ethnicity.

In chapter 6, we consider a now-classic perspective on this process of adaptation to environmental change: the theory of cognitive dissonance. In contrast to traditional theories of reward-based learning, the cognitive dissonance thesis anticipates that individuals adapt their beliefs and attitudes more quickly in the absence of rewards, and specifically when they are confronted with undesirable tasks or conditions. But the established causal candidate of interest-related factors might also explain feedback pressures when it comes to the impacts of counterterrorism policy on opinion. We evaluate the evidence and in doing so unearth a new feature of policy feedback: our tests suggest that policy change acts primarily to enhance or leave intact, but not to reduce, support for counterterrorism practices.

Our concluding chapter brings these results together. They point to the importance of symbolic cues that go well beyond historical events and realities; particularly notable are the national and ethnic identities of the group targets of counterterrorism policies. They also suggest additional implications for the future of counterterrorism policies in America. Our results and interpretations suggest that public support for elements of the war on terror are substantial; under the right conditions, this support can also be propelled upward by communications about disliked groups and simple reminders of past terrorism plots. But our results also point to possible scenarios under which public reasoning might move in new directions toward reconsideration and greater mobilization of rights support may be possible.