

Responding to Terrorism: Challenges for Democracy

Student Text



THE
**CHOICES
PROGRAM**
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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PREVIEW
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Introduction: What Is Terrorism?

Terrorism is a violent tactic used by groups of people that target civilians for political purposes. It is a tactic used by groups with different religious beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, and political ideologies. No single group holds a monopoly on terrorism. Terrorism takes place in countries around the world.

The likelihood of someone living in the United States dying at the hands of a terrorist is 1 in 3.5 million. Americans are far more likely to die in a car accident or to be the victims of a homicide. At the same time, terrorism continues to take a major toll on people in many other countries. The brutality of terrorism, as well as the fear and uncertainty it creates, makes it an issue that deserves our attention.

The term terrorism is controversial. Which violent acts get called “terrorism” and who gets called a “terrorist” is often disputed. To call someone a terrorist or something “an act of terrorism” are labels that can provoke fear and anger among the public.

Terrorism can also lead to a strong response by governments. The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, killed nearly three thousand people. September 11 was a turning point for U.S. policy. The U.S. government changed its foreign policy, leading to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as military operations around the world that it claimed were necessary to fight terrorism. (See the map of “U.S. Counterterrorism Operations—2018-2020”.) Changes also took place in the United States. September 11 created a climate of fear and uncertainty. The U.S. government passed laws and developed programs that it argued protected security but that critics argued violated human rights and the Constitution.

The September 11 attacks were planned and carried out by al Qaeda, an extremist Muslim terrorist organization that opposed the U.S. presence in the Middle East and tried to justify their actions using the religion of Islam. These and other high-profile attacks by Muslim terrorists in the years that followed led some people in the United States to express anti-Muslim viewpoints, engage in racial profiling, commit hate crimes against Muslims,

Introduction Definitions

Extremists—Extremists are individuals or groups that adhere to a fringe ideology, and often resort to violence or intimidation—especially against civilians—in pursuing their goals.

Xenophobia—Xenophobia is a fear, distrust, or intense dislike of people from another country.

Ideology—An ideology is a deeply ingrained set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that guides actions.

White Extremism—White extremism is an umbrella term that includes white nationalist, white supremacist, neo-Nazi, xenophobic, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic ideologies.

and oppose immigration from Muslim-majority countries. Fed by the claims of terrorists who say they acted in the name of their religion, fear and anti-Muslim sentiment grew.

Although September 11, 2001 marked a pivotal moment for many people in the United States and in other countries, terrorism did not begin or end that day. In fact, the threat of terrorism in the United States has changed since 2001. According to an October 2020 report by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the threat from al Qaeda and other foreign terrorist groups continues, but no longer represents the greatest terrorist threat to people in the United States. The increasing number of attacks by white extremists in recent years against Jewish, Black, Muslim, and Latino people and other groups led the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to classify these extremists as the most dangerous threat in the United States.

“[R]acially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—specifically white supremacist extremists (WSEs)—will remain the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland [United States]. Spikes in other DVE [Domestic Violence Extremists] threats probably will depend on political

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Teacher Resource Book

TEACHER RESOURCE BOOK

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Oral History and September 11

Objectives:

Students will: Explore the human dimension of the September 11 attacks by conducting an interview.

Consider the benefits and limitations of using oral history to learn about the past.

Assess their own views on September 11.

Note: This lesson is designed to be completed over the course of two class periods—one day to prepare for the interviews and one day for students to share what they learned from their interviews and debrief as a class. Encourage students to film or record their interviews if possible.

Teaching about terrorism will require special sensitivity. Some students could have family members or friends who have been affected by terrorism. Misunderstandings about religion, including the relationship between Islam and terrorism, should be planned for. We encourage teachers to consider carefully the dynamics of their classrooms as they prepare to teach these materials. Discussions can take unexpected turns. Students may unwittingly offend each other. Teachers need to be aware of these possibilities and act to make their classrooms a safe place for learning. While we cannot offer a formula for dealing with all situations, being prepared will go a long way to helping students explore this difficult and important topic.

Required Reading:

Students should have read the Introduction and Part I and completed “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Introduction and Part I” (TRB 3-4) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Introduction and Part I” (TRB-5).

Handouts:

“Remembering September 11” (TRB-9)

“Considering Oral Histories” (TRB-10), one for each group

Part I: Interview Preparation

1. Considering Oral History—Begin class with a brief discussion of oral history. What is oral history? Why is it important? What can we learn about a moment in history by asking questions of people who lived through it?

Ask students what they know about the attacks of September 11, 2001. What happened? Why are the attacks significant? How did people around the world react to the attacks? What might students learn from people who remember the attacks? For example, what different information could students learn about September 11 from: a firefighter who worked at Ground Zero in the days and weeks after the attacks? The spouse of a person who lost their life in the attacks? A Muslim American soldier? An airline security official who was working at the time of the attacks? A security advisor to President George W. Bush? An Arab American doctor in the United States? A teacher in the Middle East who watched the attacks on TV? A police officer in Scranton, Pennsylvania?

2. Prepare for an Interview—Tell students that they will be interviewing someone they know about September 11. Distribute “Remembering September 11” and tell students to read the instructions and questions. Give students a few minutes to think about whom they would like to interview. Encourage them to think about the kind of information they could learn from the experiences and views of the person they are interviewing. Ask students to brainstorm three additional questions they want to ask. Students should write these questions on the handout.

Homework:

Students should conduct their interview and complete “Remembering September 11.”

Part 2: Interview Debrief

1. Form Small Groups—Divide the class into groups of three or four and distribute “Considering Oral Histories.” Instruct students to share with their group what they learned from their interview and what their interviewee’s experiences and memories of September 11 were. Each group should record their answers to the questions on the handout. Encourage students that filmed or recorded their interviews to share a few minutes of the recordings with their group.

2. Share Conclusions—Gather the class together and call on students to discuss their group’s interviews. Did the interview subjects share any common memories, experiences, or attitudes? How did people’s experiences and views differ? Did students learn anything new about September 11 from conducting these interviews? In the years following the attacks, September 11 was a highly emotional topic for people across the country. Do students think this is still true today? Do students think that the fear of terrorism that emerged in the United States after September 11 shaped public opinion and policymaking at the time (for example, the decision to embark on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq)? If so, how? If not, why not? Does that fear still exist today?

Do students think that conducting interviews about individuals’ experiences is a valuable way to learn about history? What are the benefits of oral history? What are its limitations?

3. Reassess Student Views—Ask students to reflect on their own views about September 11. How have their attitudes toward the attacks changed over time? Have students’ opinions and perspectives on September 11 changed since hearing about someone else’s personal experience?

Extra Challenge:

Ask students what other stories would be important to hear to gain a fuller understanding of September 11. Tell students that there are many written accounts and audio interviews available online in which people share their memories of and reflections on September 11. For example, StoryCorps provides a compilation of audio interviews of people who were directly affected by the attacks: <<https://storycorps.org/stories/?collection=september-11th>>. “Portraits of Grief” by *The New York Times* is based on interviews with friends and families of victims: <<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/us/portraits-of-grief.html>>.

Have students explore accounts of September 11 and write a short essay on how two of those stories changed students’ understanding of the event.

Homework:

Students should read Part II and complete “Study Guide: Facts and Information—Part II” (TRB 11-12) or “Study Guide: Analysis and Synthesis—Part II” (TRB-13).

Remembering September 11

Instructions: In addition to the thousands of individuals who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, countless people from the United States and around the world were deeply affected by the attacks. Their experiences are a part of the history of September 11. To gain a deeper understanding of September 11, you will be asked to interview someone who vividly remembers this event. The subject of your interview could be a relative or a family friend.

Because September 11 is a painful and emotional memory for many people, sensitivity and respect on your part are essential. Try not to interrupt as people tell their stories. You may find it helpful to make an audio or video recording of your interview. In the course of the interview, you should seek answers to the questions below. Be prepared to discuss the results of your interview in class.

1. Name of interviewee:
2. What were you doing on September 11, 2001? How did you find out about the attacks?
3. What was your immediate reaction to the attacks? What memories are most vivid?
4. What do you remember about the response of people in the United States? The international community? The U.S. government?
5. Do you consider September 11 to be a pivotal event in your life? In the history of the United States? In world history? Did September 11 change things? (For example, your personal life? Your views of the United States and the world?)
6. What did you think about terrorism before the attacks? Did the attacks change your view on terrorism? If so, how? Do you feel the same way today?
7. Do you think that September 11 offers any lessons for people in the United States?

Additional Questions:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.