

American Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism in the Post 9/11 Era

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Abstract : September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks exposed weaknesses in federal law enforcement's ability to proactively counter threats to American homeland security. Following the attacks, legislative reforms and policy changes cleared both bureaucratic and legal obstacles to anti-terrorism efforts. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) transformed into a domestic intelligence agency responsible for preventing future terrorist attacks. Likewise, the passage of the 2001 USA Patriot Act gave federal agents new discretionary powers to more easily collect intelligence on those suspected of supporting terrorism. Despite these changes, there has been only limited scholarly attention paid to terrorism responses by the federal criminal justice system. This study sought to examine the investigative and prosecutorial changes made in the Post-9/11 era. The methodology employed bivariate and multivariate statistics using data from the American Terrorism Study (ATS). This analysis examined how policy changes are reflected in the nature of terrorism investigations, the handling of terrorist defendants by federal prosecutors, and the outcomes of terrorism cases since 2001. The findings indicate significant investigative and prosecutorial changes in the Post-9/11 era. Specifically, this study found terrorism cases involved younger defendants, fewer indictments per case, less use of human intelligence, less complicated attacks, less serious charges, and more plea bargains. Overall, this study highlights the important shifts in responses to terrorism following the 9/11 attacks.

Keywords : terrorism, law enforcement, post-9/11, federal policy

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