

57% of Americans Think Sochi Terror Attack Is Likely, Poll Says

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More than half of Americans think that a terrorist attack is likely at the Sochi Winter Olympics, set to open Friday, despite assurances by the White House that the Games will be safe, a recent poll indicates.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they thought a terrorism act at the Sochi Games would be likely, according to a joint CNN and ORC International poll, released Wednesday. This compares with the 51 percent who thought so before the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta, CNN reported.

In 1996, those concerned were proven right when a bomb blast at the Centennial Olympic Park killed two people and injured more than 110 others.

The Atlanta Games came a little over a year after the April 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed more than 160 people, and the final "Unabomber" mail bombing attack the same

month.

The Sochi Olympics open against the backdrop of two suicide bombings in Volgograd that killed at least 34 people in late December, and threats of more attacks.

U.S. President Barack Obama said in an interview broadcast on CNN on Jan. 31 that "Sochi is safe," although there are "always some risks in these large international gatherings." He also told Americans that if they want to go to the Games, they should not be dissuaded by security concerns.

But many of the respondents in the CNN/ORC poll, conducted Jan. 31 to Feb. 2, appeared to have sided with some of the gloomier views expressed by U.S. officials.

Matthew Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center, told a House Intelligence Committee hearing on Tuesday that "a number of specific threats of varying degrees of credibility" are hanging over the Games, though the massive security measures around Sochi could mean that terrorists might also target other cities.

"We think the greater danger from a terrorist perspective is in potential for attacks to occur outside of the actual venues for the Games themselves, in the area surrounding Sochi or outside of Sochi in the region," Olsen said.

About 20 percent of respondents said they view President Vladimir Putin favorably, while 54 percent had an unfavorable opinion, and 36 percent were undecided.

Fifty-five percent of Americans said they take an unfavorable view of Russia as a whole, up from 40 percent in 2011, while 41 percent regard Russia favorably.

The result put Russia slightly behind China, with that former Olympic host country scoring 51 percent in the popularity contest. Britain, the best-liked foreign country in the poll and host of the Summer Games in 2012, was viewed favorably by 88 percent of respondents and unfavorably by 9 percent.

"There are probably plenty of reasons to dislike Russia, but one drag on the country's image in the U.S. is the Russian law concerning public comments in favor of gays and lesbians," said CNN Polling Director Keating Holland. "That law is wildly unpopular in the U.S."

Eighty-six percent of respondents said they opposed Russia's gay "propaganda" law, while 13 percent thought that the U.S. should enact a similar measure, banning positive or supportive comments about LGBT people in front of minors.

The poll, conducted among 1,010 people, gave a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

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