

America's Top Fears 2019

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The Chapman University Survey of American Fears Wave 6 (2019) provides an in-depth examination into the fears of average Americans. In July of 2019, a random sample of 1,219 adults from across the United States were asked their level of fear about eighty-eight different phenomena including crime, the government, the environment, disasters, personal anxieties, technology, and many others.

Top 10 Fears of 2019

Below is a list of the 10 fears for which the highest percentage of Americans reported being "Afraid," or "Very Afraid."

Top Ten Fears of 2019		% Afraid or Very Afraid
1.	Corrupt government officials	77.2
2.	Pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes	68
3.	People I love becoming seriously ill	66.7
4.	Pollution of drinking water	64.6
5.	People I love dying	62.9
6.	Air pollution	59.5
7.	Cyber-terrorism	59.2
8.	Extinction of plant and animal species	59.1
9.	Global Warming and Climate Change	57.1
10.	Not having enough money for the future	55.7

Government Corruption Tops the List Once Again

For the fifth year in a row the top fear of Americans is corrupt government officials. And as in the previous five years, the fear that our government is corrupt far exceeds all others we asked about. More than 3/4 of Americans said they are afraid or very afraid of corrupt governmental officials in 2019. By comparison, the next highest level of fear was nearly 10 points lower at 68% (pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes).

Government corruption aside, our top ten list suggests that Americans are preoccupied by fears of four different types. Americans fear for the environment (#s 2, 4, 6, 8, & 9), fear devastating cybercrime (#7), fear bad things happening to loved ones (#s 3 & 5), and worry about their finances (#s 3 & 10). High levels of fear of loved one's becoming ill (#5) and high medical bills (#10) also indicate that health care remains a primary concern of Americans.

Fear in the Cyber Dimension

Americans are becoming more fearful of crime in cyberspace. Fear of cyber-terrorism makes it to the top ten list for the first time since increasing from 52.5% (2018) to 59.2% in 2019. The internet is an essential resource for the modern person and identity, therefore more individuals can be impacted by threats over the internet. A change in the landscape of terrorism is visible, seeing how Americans' fear of cyber-terrorism is substantially greater than the fear of a random/mass shooting (47.4%), biological warfare (46.6%), nuclear weapons attack (43.8%), and terrorism (43.4%).

Fear in the age of Trump

We now have three years of data collected about American fears since Trump's election. The table below presents the top ten lists for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Since 2016, there are two striking changes in American fears.

Top Ten Fears (2016-2019)				
	2016	2017	2018	2019
1.	Corrupt government officials (60.6%)	Corrupt Government Officials (74.5%)	Corrupt government officials (73.6%)	Corrupt government officials (77.2%)
2.	Terrorist Attack (41%)	American Healthcare Act/Trumpcare (55.3%)	Pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes (61.6%)	Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes (68%)
3.	Not having enough money for the future (39.9%)	Pollution of Oceans, Rivers and Lakes (53.1%)	Pollution of drinking water (60.7%)	People I love becoming seriously ill (66.7%)
4.	Terrorism (38.5%)	Pollution of Drinking Water (50.4%)	Not having enough money for the future (57%)	Pollution of drinking water (64.6%)
5.	Gun control (38.5%)	Not having enough money for the future (50.2%)	People I love becoming seriously ill (56.5%)	People I love dying (62.9%)
6.	People I love dying (38.1%)	High Medical Bills (48.4%)	People I love dying (56.4%)	Air pollution (59.5%)
7.	Economic/financial collapse (37.5%)	The US will be involved in another World War (48.4%)	Air Pollution (55.1%)	Cyber-terrorism (59.2%)
8.	Identity theft (37.1%)	Global Warming &	Extinction of plant	Extinction of plant

		Climate Change (48%)	and animal species (54.1%)	and animal species (59.1%)
9.	People I love becoming seriously ill (35.9%)	North Korea using weapons (47.5%)	Global Warming and Climate Change (53.2%)	Global Warming and Climate Change (57.1%)
10.	The Affordable Health Care Act/Obamacare (35.5%)	Air Pollution (44.9%)	High Medical Bills (52.9%)	Not having enough money for the future (55.7%)

Increasing Fear About the Environment

A striking difference between 2016 and 2017-2019 has to do with the environment. Since Trump's election, Americans' are increasingly fearful of pollution, global warming, and other environmental disasters. Not a single environmental concern made the top 10 list in 2016. In 2017, four of the top ten fears were related to the environment (#s 3, 4, 8, & 10). In 2018 and 2019, five of the top ten fears were environmental in nature (#s 2, 3, 7, 8, & 9).

Fear in on the Rise

The extent to which Americans are afraid, in general, also appears to be on the rise.

In 2016, the highest level of fear reported by our respondents was for corrupt government officials at 60.6%. From there fear dropped precipitously, with #2 on the list in 2016 (terrorist attack) down to forty-one percent and the rest of the 2016 top ten list all under forty percent.

By 2017, the top fear (corrupt government officials) was up to 74.5%, and five of the top ten fears were expressed by more than half of the population.

In 2018 and 2019, all the top ten fears were held by more than half of Americans. The noticeable increase in the top ten fears have ranged from:

- 2016: 35.5% to 60.6%
- 2017: 44.9% to 74.5%
- 2018: 52.9% to 73.6%
- 2019: 55.7% to 77.2%

Americans are becoming more afraid.

The Complete List of Fears, 2019

The following is a complete, list of all fears addressed by the Chapman University Survey of American Fears Wave 6 (2019), ranked by the percent of Americans who reported being afraid or very afraid.

Sorted by Percent Afraid/Very Afraid

Complete List of Fears (2019)	% Afraid or Very Afraid
1. Corrupt government officials	77.2
2. Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes	68
3. People I love becoming seriously ill	66.7
4. Pollution of drinking water	64.6
5. People I love dying	62.9
6. Air pollution	59.5
7. Cyber-terrorism	59.2
8. Extinction of plant and animal species	59.1
9. Global warming and climate change	57.1
10. Not having enough money for the future	55.7
11. Economic/financial collapse	55.3
12. High medical bills	53
13. Corporate tracking of personal data	52.4
14. The U.S. will be involved in another world war	52
15. Terrorist attack	51.4
16. Becoming seriously ill	51.3
17. Government tracking of personal data	50
18. Identity theft	50
19. Oil spills	47.8
20. Widespread civil unrest	47.8
21. The outcome of the 2020 election	47.5
22. Random/Mass shooting	47.4
23. Being hit by a drunk driver	47
24. Communism	46.9
25. Biological warfare	46.6
26. Credit card fraud	46.6
27. North Korea using nuclear weapons	44.9
28. The collapse of the electrical grid	44.3
29. Nuclear weapons attack	43.8
30. Terrorism	43.4

31.	Pandemic or a major epidemic	42.8
32.	Not having enough money to pay my rent/and or mortgage	40.5
33.	Iran using nuclear weapons	40.1
34.	Devastating drought	39.2
35.	Theft of property	38.2
36.	Socialism	37.8
37.	Nuclear accident/meltdown	37.7
38.	Break-ins	37.6
39.	Government restrictions on firearms and ammunition	37.1
40.	Computers replacing people in the workforce	36.8
41.	Heights	36.2
42.	Losing my data, photos or important documents in a disaster	35.7
43.	Being unemployed	35.2
44.	Dying	34.6
45.	Devastating wildfire	34.3
46.	Devastating hurricane	33.2
47.	Sharks	32.3
48.	Devastating tornado	32.2
49.	Devastating flood	32.2
50.	Racial/Hate crime	31.9
51.	Devastating earthquake	31.8
52.	Capitalism	31.7
53.	Globalization/Globalism	31.7
54.	Public speaking	31.2
55.	Murder by a stranger	31
56.	Government use of drones within the U.S.	30.7
57.	Mugging	30
58.	Police brutality	29.9
59.	Not being able to pay off college debt, now or in the future, whether it be yours, a child's or partner's	29.2
60.	Financial fraud (such as a Ponzi scheme, embezzlement etc.)	29
61.	Devastating blizzard/winter storm	28.2
62.	Abduction/Kidnapping	27.1
63.	Illegal immigration	26.5
64.	Sexual assault by a stranger	26.2
65.	Gang violence	26
66.	Reptiles (snakes, lizards, etc.)	25.9
67.	Insects/arachnids (spiders, bees, etc.)	25.7
68.	Deep lakes and oceans	24.4

69. Stalking	24.1
70. Walking alone at night	23.2
71. Murder by someone you know	22.2
72. Technology that I don't understand	21.7
73. Small enclosed spaces	21.4
74. Sexual assault by someone you know	20.3
75. Germs	18.8
76. Harmful side effects from the flu vaccine	17
77. Large volcanic eruption	16.7
78. Needles	16.6
79. Catching influenza (the seasonal flu)	16.5
80. Flying	13.5
81. Whites no longer being the majority in the U.S.	13.4
82. Catching the flue from a flu vaccine	12.6
83. Strangers	12.3
84. Zombies	9.3
85. Clowns	8.2
86. Blood	8.1
87. Ghosts	7.7
88. Animals (dogs, rats, etc.)	5.5

Sorted Alphabetically

Complete List of Fears (2019)	% Afraid or Very Afraid
1. Abduction/Kidnapping	27.1
2. Air pollution	59.5
3. Animals (dogs, rats, etc.)	5.5
4. Becoming seriously ill	51.3
5. Being hit by a drunk driver	47
6. Being unemployed	35.2
7. Biological warfare	46.6
8. Blood	8.1
9. Break-ins	37.6
10. Capitalism	31.7
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27. Devastating wildfire	34.3
28. Dying	34.6
29. Economic/financial collapse	55.3
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36.	Global warming and climate change	57.1
37.	Globalization/Globalism	31.7
38.	Government restrictions on firearms and ammunition	37.1
39.	Government tracking of personal data	50
40.	Government use of drones within the U.S.	30.7
41.	Harmful side effects from the flu vaccine	17
42.	Heights	36.2
43.	High medical bills	53
44.	Identity theft	50
45.	Illegal immigration	26.5
46.	Insects/arachnids (spiders, bees, etc.)	25.7
47.	Iran using nuclear weapons	40.1
48.	Large volcanic eruption	16.7
49.	Losing my data, photos or important documents in a disaster	35.7
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64.	Police brutality	29.9
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66.	Pollution of oceans, rivers, and lakes	68
67.	Public speaking	31.2
68.	Racial/Hate crime	31.9
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