

Fear of Crime in the U.S.: Examining What Makes Americans Afraid, and the Factors That Help Explain It

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Methodology

This supplemental methodology provides information about the data, measures, and analytic methods used in [*Fear of Crime in the U.S.: Examining What Makes Americans Afraid, and the Factors That Help Explain It*](#). The report draws on a national survey conducted by YouGov to examine Americans' fear of specific crimes, their perceived risk of victimization, and the demographic characteristics, political views, broader worries, attitudes, and neighborhood conditions associated with those fears. This document describes the survey design and sample, the measures used in the report, and the methods used to analyze the data.

Survey Design and Sample

The Council on Criminal Justice research team designed the survey, which YouGov fielded online between March 31 and April 8, 2026. YouGov interviewed 2,121 U.S. adults and used its matching and weighting procedures to produce a final analytic sample of 2,000 respondents. The survey was approved by Texas State University's Institutional Review Board (Protocol No. 10601).

Respondents were matched to a sampling frame based on the full 2023 American Community Survey one-year sample using gender, age, race, and education. The sample was then weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores based on age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, region, and home ownership. Final weights were post-stratified by 2024 presidential vote choice, gender, age, race, and education. All analyses in the report use the survey weights provided by YouGov.

YouGov’s matching and weighting approach is designed to produce estimates from opt-in samples that more closely resemble those from large probability-based surveys.¹ Not all items included in the broader survey are analyzed in the report.

Measures

The survey included measures of fear of crime, perceived risk of victimization, broader worries and beliefs, neighborhood conditions and social relationships, and attitudes about race and immigration. Unless otherwise noted, measures used a five-point Likert-type response scale and were coded so that higher values indicate higher levels of the construct being measured.

Fear of Crime and Perceived Risk of Victimization

Fear of Crime. Respondents were asked, “How worried are you that someone will try to commit the following crimes against you in the next year?” Response options ranged from “not at all worried” to “extremely worried.” Respondents rated their level of worry about 27 offenses described as follows:

1. Steal money or property from you on the street
2. Steal money or property from you at work
3. Steal money or property from you online
4. Damage your property
5. Break into your house when you are not home
6. Break into your house when you are home
7. Rob or mug you on the street
8. Kidnap you
9. Threaten you with a gun
10. Harm you with a gun

¹ Graham, A., Pickett, J. T., & Cullen, F. T. (2021). Advantages of matched over unmatched opt-in samples for studying criminal justice attitudes: A research note. *Crime & Delinquency*, 67(12), 1962-1981. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128720977439>

11. Threaten you with a knife
12. Harm you with a knife
13. Slap you
14. Kick you
15. Punch you
16. Drug you
17. Extort you for money
18. Blackmail you
19. Verbally harass you
20. Physically harass you
21. Sexually harass you
22. Stalk you in person
23. Stalk you online
24. Steal your identity
25. Rape you
26. Sexually assault you
27. Murder you

Perceived Risk of Victimization. Respondents were then asked about the same 27 offenses from the perspective of their likelihood of occurring, rather than worry: “Turning to chance or risk, how likely or unlikely is it that someone will try to commit the following crimes against you in the next year?” Response options ranged from “very unlikely” to “very likely.”

Worry about Victimization of Self and Others. Respondents were also asked, “How often do you worry about the following people being the victim of a crime?” The question covered five potential targets of victimization: themselves, family members, friends and neighbors, immigrants, and local businesses. Response options ranged from “never” to “very often.”

General Worries and Beliefs

General Worries. Respondents were asked how worried they were—ranging from “not at all worried” to “extremely worried”—about nine events or experiences:

1. Being the victim of police brutality
2. Being the victim of a mass shooting at some event or at work/school
3. Being the victim of a terrorist attack by foreign nationals
4. Having a personal health crisis
5. Not being able to provide food for yourself or your family
6. Losing your job
7. Having your home hit by a hurricane, tornado, or some other natural disaster
8. Being in a serious car accident
9. Being struck by lightning

Dangerous World Beliefs.² Respondents were also asked how much they agreed or disagreed with four statements about whether the world is dangerous, unpredictable, and threatened by social disorder or harmful people:

1. Any day now, chaos and anarchy could erupt around us. All signs are pointing to it.
2. There are many dangerous people in our society who will attack someone out of pure meanness, for no reason at all.
3. It seems that every year there are fewer and fewer truly respectable people, and more and more persons with no morals at all who threaten everyone else.
4. The world we live in is basically a dangerous and unpredictable place, in which good, decent and moral people's values and way of life are threatened and disrupted by bad people.

² Items were derived from: Stroebe, W., Leander, N. P., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2017). Is it a dangerous world out there? The motivational bases of American gun ownership. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43(8), 1071–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217703952>

General Anxiety. General anxiety was measured using the seven-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7).³ Respondents were asked, “Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?” Responses ranged from “not at all” to “nearly every day” on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The GAD-7 items are:

1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying
3. Worrying too much about different things
4. Trouble relaxing
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable
7. Feeling as if something awful might happen

Neighborhood Conditions and Social Environment

Neighborhood Disorder. Respondents were asked, “How much of a problem is each of the following in your neighborhood?” Response options ranged from “not a problem” to “a very big problem.” Respondents rated 10 conditions reflecting physical and social disorder:

1. Litter and trash
2. Graffiti
3. Rundown or vacant houses
4. Noisy neighbors
5. Drug use
6. People hanging out on corners
7. People asking for money on the street

³ Spitzer, R. L., Kroenke, K., Williams, J. B., & Löwe, B. (2006). A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder: the GAD-7. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166(10), 1092–1097.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/archinte.166.10.1092>

8. Homeless tents or encampments
9. People arguing loudly
10. Gunshots

Collective Efficacy. Respondents were asked, “Thinking about the people living in your neighborhood, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following?” Responses ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The first four items measured social cohesion and the final four items measured informal social control:

1. They get along with each other.
2. They are willing to help their neighbors.
3. They share the same values.
4. They can be trusted.
5. They would help the neighborhood take action if the fire station closest to their home were threatened with budget cuts.
6. They would participate in a neighborhood cleanup to improve local streets or public spaces.
7. If there were a rise in car break-ins, they would work together to combat the crime.
8. They would work together to push the city to address problems such as abandoned lots or vacant homes.

Law Enforcement Visibility. Respondents were asked, “How often or rarely do you see the police doing each of the following in your neighborhood?” Response options ranged from “very rarely” to “very often.” The six activities were:

1. Driving around in a patrol car
2. Walking on foot patrol
3. Stopping people or drivers
4. Arresting people or drivers
5. Helping people
6. Talking to neighbors

Neighbor Visibility. Respondents were similarly asked how often they saw their neighbors engaging in activities in their neighborhood. Response options ranged from “very rarely” to “very often.” The activities included:

1. Walking on foot
2. Hanging out with other neighbors
3. Saying hello to other neighbors

Social Attitudes

Racial Resentment.⁴ Respondents were asked, “Now, thinking about the different racial and ethnic groups in the United States, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?” Responses ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The five statements were:

1. There is a lot of discrimination against Black Americans in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead.
2. It is really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Black Americans would only try harder, they could be just as well off as White Americans.
3. Irish, Italians, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Black Americans should do the same without any special favors.
4. Over the past few years, Black Americans have gotten less than they deserve.
5. Slavery and racial discrimination is part of the history of the United States, but it is time to move beyond it.

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment. Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with six statements about immigration and its effects on the country. Responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statements were:

1. If undocumented immigration is not stopped, the nation’s way of life will be permanently damaged.
2. Undocumented immigrants are more of a problem than a benefit to the country.

⁴ The first four items were adapted from: Kinder, D. R., & Sanders, L. M. (1996). *Divided by color: Racial politics and democratic ideals*. University of Chicago Press. The fifth item was drawn from this poll: Marist. (2016, May). *How the survey was conducted*. https://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us160502/Point%20Taken/Reparations/Exclusive%20Point%20Taken-Marist%20Poll_Reparations%20Banner%202_May%202016.pdf

3. Most undocumented immigrants are trying to build better lives for themselves and their families.
4. If we allow too many immigrants into the country, we will no longer have a national identity.
5. Immigrants are responsible for many of the social problems we face in the country.
6. More immigration strengthens the country.

Demographic and Political Characteristics

The analyses also included several demographic and political characteristics drawn from respondents' YouGov profile data.

Sex. Respondents were categorized as male or female. The measure was coded with female respondents compared with male respondents as the reference group.

Age. Age was measured continuously and calculated from respondents' reported year of birth and age at the time of the survey.

Race and Ethnicity. YouGov classified respondents into eight racial and ethnic categories: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, two or more races, other race, and Middle Eastern. For the analyses presented in the report, these categories were combined into three groups: White, Black, and "other race or ethnicity." White respondents served as the reference group in statistical comparisons.

Political Party Affiliation. Respondents identified as Democrat, Republican, Independent, another political party, or not sure. For analysis, respondents who selected another political party or not sure were combined into a single "other" category.

Political Ideology. Respondents described their political ideology as very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, very conservative, or not sure. Responses were recoded to a five-point scale ranging from "very liberal" to "very conservative." Respondents who selected not sure were combined with those identifying as moderate.

Analytic Approach

Scoring and Scale Construction

Survey items originally scored from 1 to 5 were rescaled from 0 to 4 for analysis. This change allowed the lowest response category, such as “not at all worried,” to be represented by zero rather than one and made the resulting scores easier to interpret.

For analyses using multi-item measures, responses were combined to create a single score for each construct. Except for general worries, these measures were constructed by averaging responses across the items included in each measure. The general worries measure was constructed by summing responses across its nine items.

For analyses focused on selected crime fears, the report examines five offenses: identity theft, online theft, home break-in, sexual assault, and murder. A Selected-Offense Fear Score was created by averaging respondents’ fear scores across these five offenses.

Comparing Fear and Perceived Risk

Fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization were measured separately but used the same 27 offenses and comparable five-point response scales. To examine how fear and perceived risk differed across offenses, fear was ranked using the “very worried” and “extremely worried” responses, and perceived risk was ranked using the “likely” and “very likely” responses.

The report uses these scores to compare the relative relationship between fear and perceived risk across offenses. Because the measures capture different concepts, the resulting comparison should be interpreted as a way to examine relative differences across offenses rather than as a direct measure of the size of the gap between fear and risk.

Correlation Analyses

Bivariate correlations were used to examine the relationships between fear of selected crimes and several demographic, political, attitudinal, and neighborhood measures. Correlations describe the strength and direction of the relationship between two measures but do not account for other factors that may influence that relationship, and cannot establish that one measure causes changes in another.

Group Comparisons and Statistical Significance

Average fear scores were compared across demographic and political groups. Statistical significance testing was used to assess whether observed differences between groups were unlikely to be due to chance. For comparisons involving multiple groups, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference test was used to identify statistically significant differences between specific groups.

Supplemental Analysis

Correlations Between Fear of Crime Items

The results of the correlations among the 27 fear-of-crime items are displayed in the following three tables.

Table S1.1. Correlations Between Fear of Crime Items

Crime	Theft while on the street	Theft at the workplace	Online theft	Property damage	Residential burglary (when not at home)	Residential burglary (when at home)	Robbery while on the street	Kidnaped	Threatened with a gun
Steal money or property from you on the street									
Steal money or property from you at work	0.62								
Steal money or property from you online	0.63	0.51							
Damage your property	0.68	0.58	0.61						
Break into your house when you are not home	0.68	0.55	0.61	0.71					
Break into your house when you are home	0.71	0.58	0.57	0.69	0.79				
Rob or mug you on the street	0.81	0.60	0.60	0.68	0.68	0.72			
Kidnap you	0.67	0.67	0.50	0.60	0.61	0.67	0.70		
Threaten you with a gun	0.73	0.59	0.59	0.68	0.68	0.73	0.76	0.72	
Harm you with a gun	0.74	0.58	0.60	0.67	0.68	0.72	0.77	0.71	0.87
Threaten you with a knife	0.75	0.62	0.59	0.69	0.68	0.72	0.78	0.73	0.81
Harm you with a knife	0.76	0.62	0.62	0.68	0.68	0.72	0.79	0.74	0.82
Slap you	0.63	0.66	0.49	0.60	0.55	0.57	0.63	0.66	0.64
Kick you	0.64	0.62	0.50	0.62	0.56	0.59	0.65	0.67	0.66
Punch you	0.69	0.63	0.55	0.65	0.61	0.64	0.71	0.67	0.72
Drug you	0.67	0.68	0.52	0.62	0.60	0.64	0.69	0.77	0.70
Extort you for money	0.65	0.66	0.59	0.60	0.57	0.62	0.65	0.69	0.65
Blackmail you	0.62	0.67	0.53	0.58	0.54	0.58	0.62	0.68	0.63
Verbally harass you	0.60	0.54	0.53	0.62	0.53	0.56	0.62	0.51	0.60
Physically harass you	0.71	0.58	0.57	0.66	0.62	0.65	0.71	0.68	0.72
Sexually harass you	0.63	0.64	0.49	0.57	0.56	0.60	0.65	0.70	0.67
Stalk you in person	0.66	0.67	0.53	0.61	0.58	0.63	0.67	0.71	0.69
Stalk you online	0.61	0.58	0.57	0.57	0.55	0.57	0.62	0.61	0.62
Steal your identity	0.57	0.45	0.68	0.56	0.58	0.54	0.56	0.45	0.55
Rape you	0.63	0.66	0.49	0.56	0.55	0.61	0.66	0.75	0.69
Sexually assault you	0.64	0.63	0.48	0.56	0.55	0.60	0.66	0.72	0.69
Murder you	0.70	0.62	0.58	0.64	0.65	0.71	0.74	0.76	0.80

Source: CCJ YouGov Survey, administered April 2026.

View a larger version of this table [here](#).

Table S1.2. Correlations Between Fear of Crime Items

Crime	Harmed with a gun	Threatened with a knife	Harmed with a knife	Slapped	Kicked	Punched	Drugged	Extorted for money	Blackmailed
Threaten you with a knife	0.79								
Harm you with a knife	0.83	0.86							
Slap you	0.61	0.68	0.68						
Kick you	0.66	0.72	0.72	0.78					
Punch you	0.69	0.74	0.75	0.77	0.77				
Drug you	0.69	0.71	0.71	0.66	0.65	0.66			
Extort you for money	0.67	0.67	0.69	0.66	0.65	0.67	0.69		
Blackmail you	0.63	0.65	0.66	0.68	0.66	0.65	0.71	0.75	
Verbally harass you	0.60	0.63	0.61	0.64	0.61	0.65	0.58	0.59	0.62
Physically harass you	0.71	0.74	0.73	0.70	0.70	0.73	0.68	0.66	0.66
Sexually harass you	0.66	0.68	0.69	0.66	0.62	0.63	0.74	0.65	0.63
Stalk you in person	0.67	0.69	0.71	0.70	0.67	0.68	0.73	0.72	0.71
Stalk you online	0.61	0.60	0.64	0.62	0.60	0.62	0.64	0.67	0.67
Steal your identity	0.56	0.53	0.55	0.46	0.44	0.48	0.48	0.53	0.50
Rape you	0.67	0.69	0.70	0.65	0.62	0.63	0.76	0.63	0.63
Sexually assault you	0.68	0.68	0.69	0.64	0.60	0.61	0.74	0.63	0.62
Murder you	0.79	0.79	0.80	0.64	0.67	0.70	0.74	0.65	0.67

Source: CCJ YouGov Survey, administered April 2026.



View a larger version of this table [here](#).

Table S1.3. Correlations Between Fear of Crime Items

Crime	Verbal harassment	Physical harassment	Sexually harassed	Stalked in-person	Stalked online	Identity theft	Raped	Sexually assaulted
Physically harass you	0.70							
Sexually harass you	0.60	0.70						
Stalk you in person	0.62	0.70	0.73					
Stalk you online	0.63	0.67	0.67	0.76				
Steal your identity	0.52	0.50	0.45	0.48	0.52			
Rape you	0.56	0.68	0.83	0.74	0.64	0.46		
Sexually assault you	0.57	0.69	0.85	0.73	0.65	0.45	0.88	
Murder you	0.56	0.71	0.70	0.70	0.63	0.52	0.73	0.72

Source: CCJ YouGov Survey, administered April 2026.



View a larger version of this table [here](#).