



Research study

The State of Safety in America

June 2021

[safewise.com](https://www.safewise.com)

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Research objectives

SafeWise conducts the annual State of Safety survey to **gain a deeper understanding** of Americans' attitudes and perceptions of **key safety and security** issues across the US.

These aims inform our reporting:

Quantify and compare attitudes, perceptions, and concerns about safety and crime issues among the general population.

Understand the means and measures the general population is taking to protect themselves and their homes on a daily basis.

Develop insights into how attitudes and perceptions of crime and safety compare to actual crime statistics and trends.

History of the survey

SafeWise has conducted the State of Safety survey annually since 2019. Over the past three years, we've talked to **more than 15,000 Americans** about their levels of concern and worry in regard to crime and safety. While violent and property crime have been the main focus, the survey has evolved each year to reflect **emerging trends and concerns**.

By the numbers

2019

State of Safety survey

- Conducted August 15–28, 2018
- **5,000** total respondents
- 100 respondents in each state
- Margin of error (MOE) of $\pm 1.4\%$, 19 times out of 20
- Report **published March 2019**

2020

State of Safety survey

- Conducted September 27–October 11, 2019
- **5,065** total respondents
- At least 100 respondents in each state
- MOE of $\pm 1.4\%$
- Report **published March 2020**

2021

State of Safety survey

- Conducted September 8–22, 2020
- **5,026** total respondents
- At least 100 respondents in each state
- MOE of $\pm 1.4\%$
- Individual state MOE of approximately $\pm 9.8\%$
- Initial report published March 2021
- Full report **published June 2021**

History of the survey

Survey evolution



2019

In the inaugural survey, we asked respondents how concerned they were about safety issues in multiple categories:

- **Violent crime**
- **Property crime**
- **Digital security**
- **Health and wellness**
- **Environmental safety**
- **Workplace safety**



2020

For the second survey, we narrowed the focus to violent and property crime so we could more easily compare and contrast sentiment with crime data. We also added questions about mass shootings, as that topic came up often in spontaneous answers from respondents in 2019.



2021

This year we continued our focus on violent and property crime but expanded the survey to reflect both current events and emerging trends noted from responses in the 2020 report. In addition to violent and property crime, we also asked respondents about the following:

- **The COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Gun violence overall (not just mass shootings)**
- **Police violence**
- **Package theft**

Report Notes

- Data and individual percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.
- Data may not equal 100% due to allowing multiple answers for some questions.
- Question detail is noted in the bottom page margins.
- All results are shown at the 95% confidence level.



Executive summary

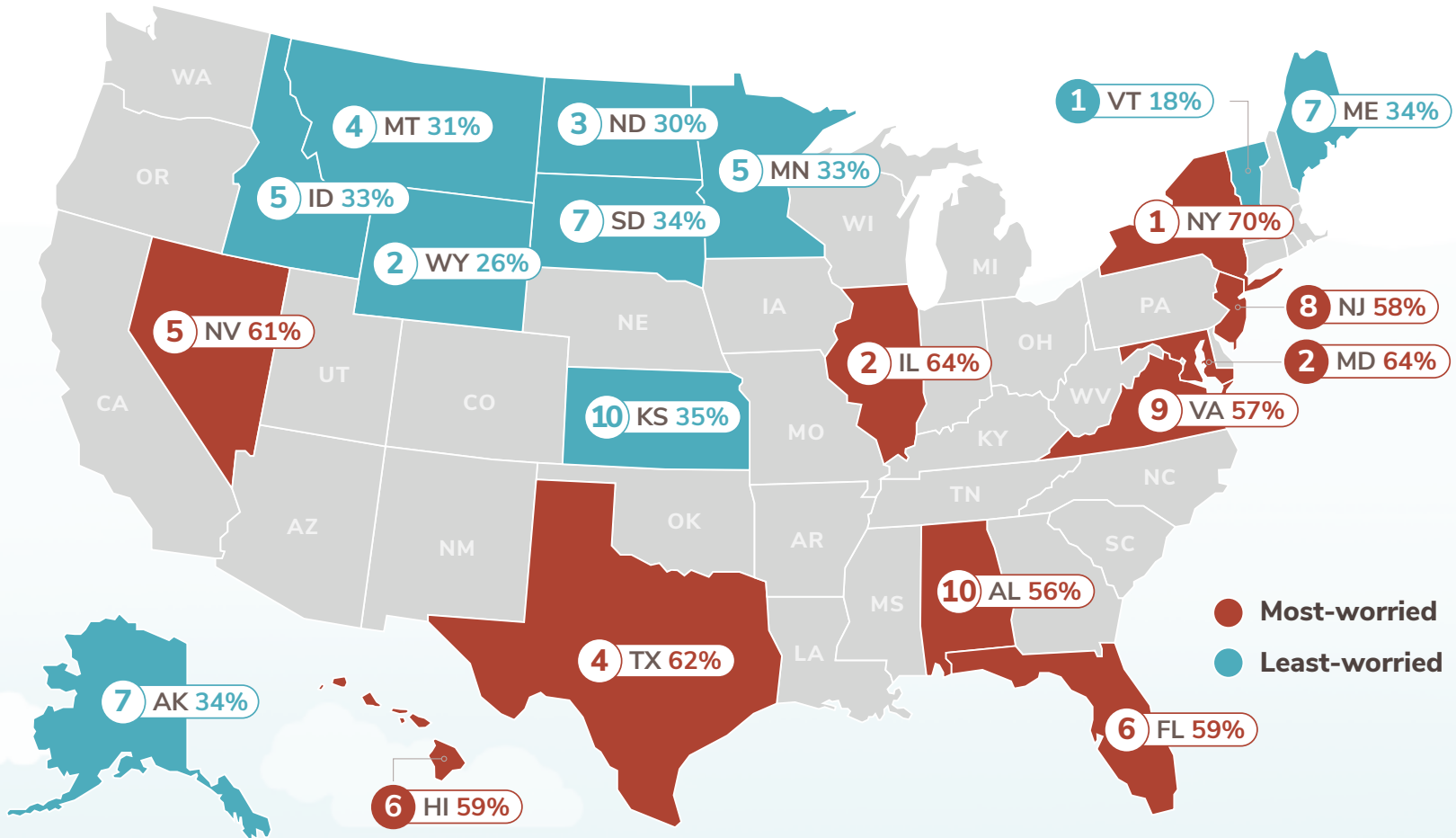
The third annual State of Safety survey was conducted during a time of political strife, civil unrest, and rising coronavirus numbers, but those ever-present issues didn't seem to impact respondents' general sense of safety and security.

Surprisingly, overall levels of concern across the US remained fairly stagnant despite the multitude of safety issues facing Americans throughout 2020. The percentage of Americans that expressed high concern about crime and safety on a daily basis rose only 2% year over year—following a dramatic 21% decrease the previous year. The number of respondents who think crime is on the rise in the US actually fell 1% year over year, despite the current national climate.



Top 10 **most-** and **least-** worried states in the US

We surveyed across the country to find what percentage of state populations are worried about safety on a daily basis.



Interesting findings

- Despite lower overall concern, **experience with crime increased** over the past three years. Violent crime experience rose 2% and property crime experience jumped 16% between 2019 and 2021.
- Nearly **7 in 10 believe crime is on the rise**, despite crime rates decreasing consistently for the past two decades.
- Just over **5 in 10 Americans feel safe in their home state**, with those in the New England, West North Central, and Mountain regional districts feeling the safest.
- **Gun violence is the most top-of-mind violent crime issue**, with 5 in 10 feeling high concern every day.



- Respondents in the **Pacific regional district feel the least safe** calling their state home.



- **Package theft is the most-worrisome property crime concern**, with nearly 5 in 10 afraid it will happen to them and 2 in 10 experiencing a package theft incident in the past 12 months.
- **4 in 10 worry about police violence** on a daily basis, but nearly 6 in 10 have confidence in law enforcement's approach to crime prevention.
- **6 in 10 Americans are highly concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic**, with 4 in 10 believing it has affected their personal safety and 3 in 10 believing it has affected the security of their property.

How the most- and least-worried

States compare

New York vs. Vermont



New York is the most concerned state in the nation, while Vermonters expressed the least daily worry about crime and safety. We took a closer look at those differences and what each state has to say about their level of worry.

Level of concern for different issues

State	Overall	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Package Theft	Gun Violence	COVID-19
US Average	47%	41%	42%	45%	38%	62%
New York	70%	74%	64%	64%	73%	76%
Vermont	18%	23%	33%	33%	17%	59%

B1: For the remainder of the study, we want to focus our discussion on safety and security concerns that you may personally face, or your community is facing today. Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about your safety and/or security on a daily basis? / C1: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, how concerned are you about the following happening to you? Violent crime, Property crime, Package theft, Gun violence / B8. Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the COVID-19 pandemic on a day to day basis?

New York vs. Vermont

Why are New Yorkers so worried?

Here are some thoughts directly from survey respondents:

"Crimes in the city [are] going up since the pandemic."

"The world is becoming a terrible place to live. You have to constantly watch everything that's going on so that you can make quick and sound decisions."

"House break-ins and car thefts are a major problem in my area, and it seems to be getting worse."

What makes Vermonters feel safe?

Vermonters kept their responses short and sweet:

"Nothing really [keeps me up at night], I live in a very secure area."

"I feel pretty safe where I am."

"We have a pretty safe neighborhood."

40%

of New Yorkers feel safe in their state.

55%

of Americans feel safe in their state.

78%

of Vermonters feel safe in their state.

Regional trends

To see how crime concerns are changing across the US, we compared regional results from the last three years.

Rank	Region	% feel safe in their state	Regional violent crime rate	Regional property crime rate
	US average	55%	3.7	21.1
1	New England	69%	2.4	12.8
2	West North Central	62%	3.5	22.0
3	Mountain	59%	4.2	23.6
4	East South Central	51%	4.4	24.4
5	South Atlantic	51%	3.7	21.8
6	Mid-Atlantic	49%	3.1	13.7
7	West South Central	49%	4.5	25.6
8	East North Central	48%	3.7	18.1
9	Pacific	45%	4.1	24.3

"I feel safe in my house and community. We do not leave our doors locked. We have never had a package taken from our doorstep. We feel happy and secure." —Maine respondent

High daily concern by region 2019–2021

Rank	Region	2021	2020	2019	Net % change 2019-2021
	US average	47%	46%	56%	↓ 8%
1	Mid-Atlantic	59%	49%	51%	↑ 8%
2	South Atlantic	53%	50%	50%	↑ 3%
3	West South Central	52%	49%	49%	↑ 3%
4	East South Central	52%	53%	52%	0
5	East North Central	51%	47%	46%	↑ 6%
6	Pacific	47%	50%	48%	↓ 1%
7	New England	40%	41%	42%	↓ 2%
8	Mountain	40%	41%	42%	↓ 2%
9	West North Central	39%	39%	39%	0

↑ ↓ indicates net % change 2019-2021

“I don't usually worry about safety, but sometimes I think about whether or not the violence that is going on in the country could make its way to where I live.” —Alabama respondent

“Young adult female. Always aware of surroundings and personal safety. Live in [an] apartment so constantly worried about security in [the] parking lot.” —North Carolina respondent

2021 crime experience by region*

Rank	Region	% violent crime experience	% property crime experience	% gun violence experience	% package theft experience	% average of all experience
	US average	10%	18%	20%	8%	14.0%
1	East South Central	14%	21%	14%	20%	17.3%
2	Mid-Atlantic	14%	15%	12%	23%	16.0%
3	East North Central	13%	19%	11%	19%	15.5%
4	South Atlantic	11%	17%	10%	20%	14.5%
5	West North Central	10%	21%	7%	19%	14.3%
6	Pacific	9%	19%	5%	23%	14.0%
7	Mountain	8%	17%	5%	21%	12.8%
8	West South Central	9%	15%	8%	19%	12.8%
9	New England	8%	16%	6%	19%	12.3%

*Respondents who reported experiencing the issue in the past 12 months.

"I worry about people out late at night with drugs and guns." —Mississippi respondent

*"Nothing [keeps me up at night]. I live [in] a large town with very little crime over the years."
—Connecticut respondent*

Violent crime experience 2019–2021*

Rank	Region	2021	2020	2019	Net % change 2019-2021
	US average	10%	12%	10%	↑ 2%
1	East South Central	14%	16%	9%	↑ 33%
2	Mid-Atlantic	14%	9%	7%	↑ 43%
3	East North Central	13%	15%	10%	↑ 19%
4	South Atlantic	11%	11%	11%	0%
5	West North Central	10%	11%	6%	↑ 37%
6	West South Central	9%	17%	9%	↑ 21%
7	Pacific	9%	14%	9%	↑ 10%
8	New England	8%	9%	6%	↑ 20%
9	Mountain	8%	10%	5%	↑ 40%

↑ ↓ indicates net % change 2019-2021

*Respondents who reported experiencing the issue in the past 12 months.

“Nothing [keeps me up at night]. No violent crime in our town in the 20 years I’ve been here.”

—New Hampshire respondent

“[I worry about] the amount of unrest in nearby communities, from protests that have gotten violent to a lot of burglary in all the surrounding communities.”

—Wisconsin respondent

Property crime experience 2019–2021*

Rank	Region	2021	2020	2019	Net % change 2019-2021
	US average	18%	26%	16%	↑ 16%
1	East South Central	21%	32%	16%	↑ 33%
2	West North Central	21%	27%	13%	↑ 43%
3	Pacific	19%	31%	18%	↑ 17%
4	East North Central	19%	21%	14%	↑ 20%
5	South Atlantic	17%	27%	15%	↑ 22%
6	Mountain	17%	25%	16%	↑ 12%
7	New England	16%	19%	10%	↑ 37%
8	West South Central	15%	30%	18%	↑ 9%
9	Mid-Atlantic	15%	18%	9%	↑ 42%

↑ ↓ indicates net % change 2019-2021

*Respondents who reported experiencing the issue in the past 12 months.

“I have kids so a robbery or burglary to my home is what bothers me the most.” —Georgia respondent

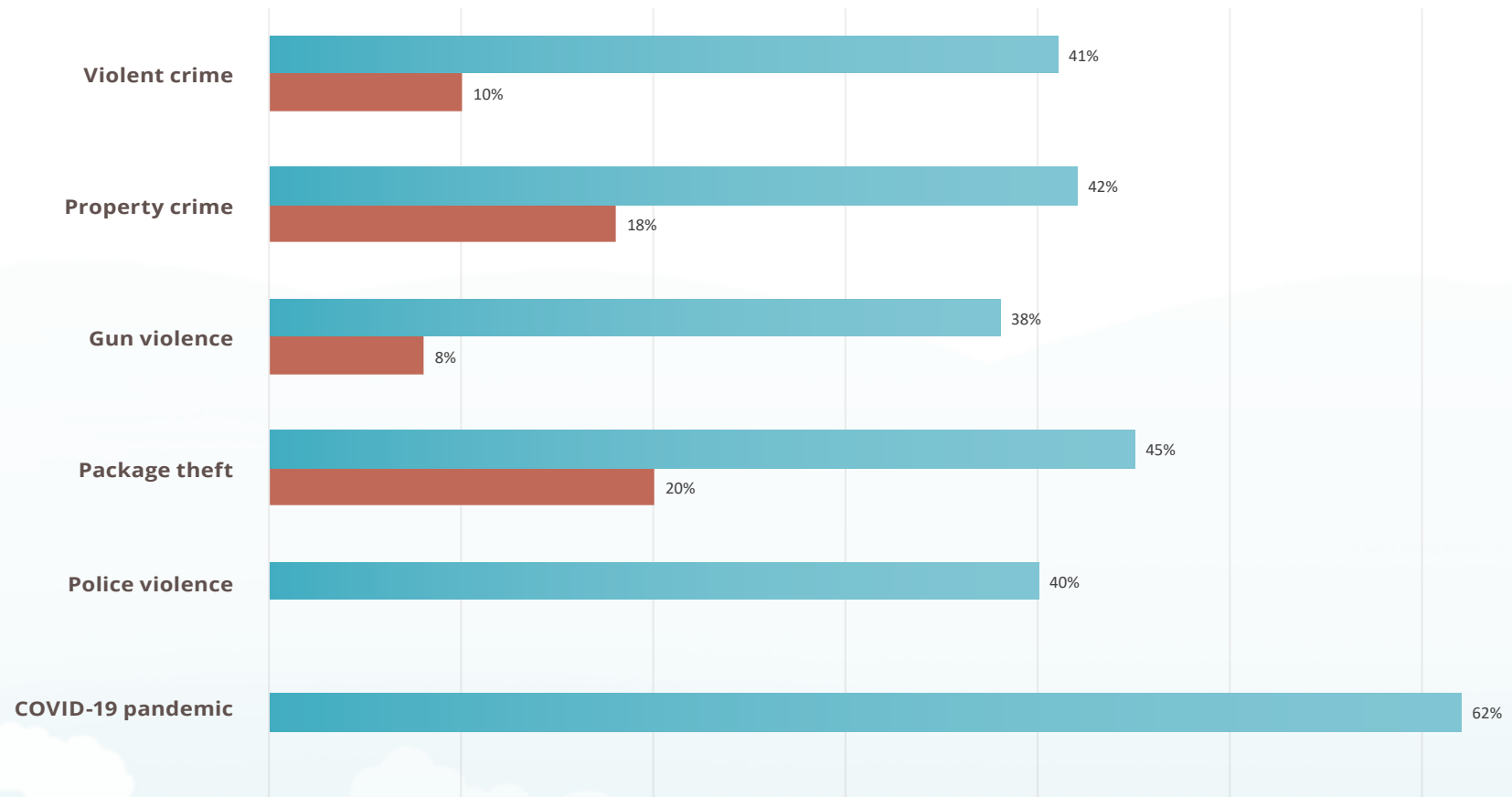
Crime and safety issues

Even though overall levels of concern didn't spike as we expected this year, different things are causing high anxiety across the US. Many expressed that their safety or security concerns are rooted in the overall social unrest in the nation:

- "I worry about the hate and anger of people, violence against others and property damage, someone breaking into my home." —Alaska respondent
- "I always start thinking about yesterday could've been the last day of living. You never know what can happen nowadays with these shootings happening." —Missouri respondent
- "Safety concerns as in being a Black man in America and having Black male family members—as well as foreign and domestic terrorism/shootings and now a global pandemic. It's just a bit much" —Missouri respondent

This year's report takes a look at Americans' attitudes about violent and property crime, as well as emerging areas of concern including gun violence, package theft, police violence, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021 US concern about crime and safety issues



■ % highly concerned 2021
 ■ % experienced* 2021

*Respondents who reported experiencing the issue in the past 12 months.

B5: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the following on a day to day basis? Police violence / B8: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the COVID-19 pandemic on a day to day basis? / C1: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, how concerned are you about the following happening to you? Violent crime, Property crime, Package theft, Gun violence / C2: Have you, or anyone you know, experienced the following in the last 12 months? Violent crimes, Property crimes, Gun violence, Package theft

2021 regional concern about crime and safety issues

Region	Violent crime	Property crime	Gun violence	Package theft	Police violence	COVID-19
US average	41%	42%	38%	45%	40%	62%
East North Central	45%	45%	43%	47%	44%	65%
East South Central	46%	46%	43%	48%	42%	62%
Mid-Atlantic	56%	54%	55%	51%	53%	69%
Mountain	39%	41%	33%	43%	36%	56%
New England	34%	37%	29%	42%	36%	64%
Pacific	38%	40%	35%	43%	39%	62%
South Atlantic	45%	46%	41%	48%	47%	65%
West North Central	33%	35%	31%	39%	34%	60%
West South Central	47%	48%	43%	47%	41%	63%

"I worry about COVID-19, and I worry about the police." —Colorado respondent

"I live in a very safe city [with] a police force that the residents respect." —Massachusetts respondent

B5: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the following on a day to day basis? Police violence / B8: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the COVID-19 pandemic on a day to day basis? / C1: Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, how concerned are you about the following happening to you? Violent crime, Property crime, Package theft, Gun violence / B8. Using a scale from 1 to 7 where '1' is not at all concerned and '7' is very concerned, overall, how concerned are you about the COVID-19 pandemic on a day to day basis?

US concern and experience with crime 2019–2021

Region	2021	2020	2019	Net % change 2019-2021
Violent crime concern	41%	30%	56%	↓ 5%
Violent crime experience	10%	12%	10%	↑ 2%
Property crime concern	42%	49%	59%	↓ 16%
Property crime experience	18%	26%	16%	↑ 16%

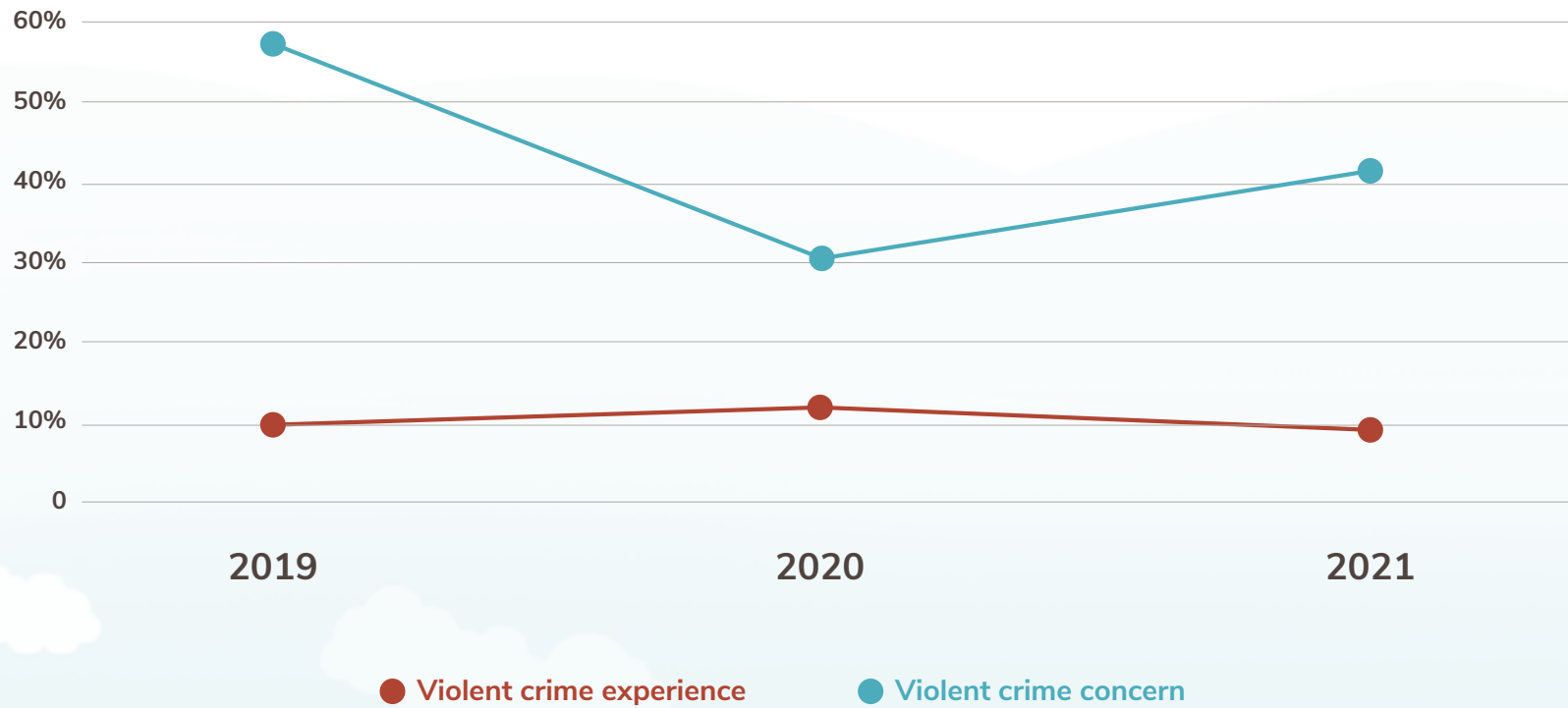
↑ ↓ indicates net % change 2019-2021

“Walking to and from my car at night, [I have] concerns about sexual assault, mugging, robbery, assault, and murder.” —Arizona respondent

US concern and experience with crime 2019–2021



Violent crimes



US concern and experience with crime 2019–2021



Property crimes



Interesting findings

- Concern for both violent and property crime has declined in the past three years, but personal experience with crime has increased.
- Concern dropped the most between 2019 and 2020—that’s also when experience with crime increased the most.
- Regional trends reflect the sentiment of the most- and least-concerned states, with the Mid-Atlantic region (home to most-worried state New York) showing higher concern than the New England and Mountain regions (home to least-worried states Vermont and Wyoming).
- Regional concern about the COVID-19 pandemic is somewhat reflective of how hard individual states were hit by both cases and deaths, with the Mid-Atlantic region (home to hard-hit New York) showing the highest concern in the country.

“Sometimes I wonder if the house is secure enough. My husband is a very heavy sleeper and would not hear an intruder.” —Kansas respondent

Does perception of crime lead to action?

Despite current events, general perception of crime is similar to last year, with two-thirds of Americans believing crime is on the rise. But the perception of rising crime doesn't necessarily lead people to enhance their safety and security measures. Experiencing a crime is the greatest motivator for people to increase safety measures.

- Nearly 7 in 10 Americans believe crime is increasing.
- 22% increased their personal safety or property security measures in the past 12 months.
- For those who've experienced a crime in the past year, 42% have taken proactive measures to improve safety.
- Of those who haven't recently experienced a crime, only 13% improved their safety measures in the past year.

"I really don't have any safety concerns as long as I have deadbolt locks and a dog to alert me if someone breaks in." —Delaware respondent

A closer look at

Personal safety measures

Nearly 7 in 10 Americans don't use any kind of personal safety protection, the same number as in 2020. For the 3 in 10 who do, only 17% carry it with them most of the time. These are the most common types of protection used.

Type of personal protection	% who use it (2021)	% who use it (2020)
Pepper spray or pepper gun	38%	39%
Concealed carry firearm	38%	39%
Pocket knife or self-defense knife	37%	42%
Stun device	19%	18%
Keychain weapon	17%	17%
Rape alarm or whistle	13%	11%
None of the above/prefer not to say	11%	12%

"I feel safe in my house and community. We do not leave our doors locked. We have never had a package taken from our doorstep. We feel happy and secure." —Maine respondent

Interesting findings

- Men, people with children, and 18–34-year-olds are most likely to use personal safety protection and carry it with them most of the time.
- People 55 and older are the least likely to use any method of personal protection.
- 4 in 10 people from the southern US use some kind of personal safety measure, and half of those carry it with them most of the time—the most of any region.
- Women and those aged 18–34 are most likely to carry pepper spray or a pepper gun.
- Men and those aged 55 and older are most likely to use a firearm for self defense.
- Knives are the second-most used form of personal protection for both men and women.

"I worry that my apartment isn't as safe as I can make it. I'm always concerned if I have the bar in the track of the sliding glass door." —Virginia respondent

"I make sure that doors are locked tightly and secured. I also always lock my windows." —Pennsylvania respondent

A closer look at

Property security measures

Use of property security measures decreased overall by 6% year over year. Those who do use some type of security preferred proactive and preventative measures this year over more reactive defense tools like weapons. Use of security cameras and security systems increased while reliance on guard dogs and firearms dipped.

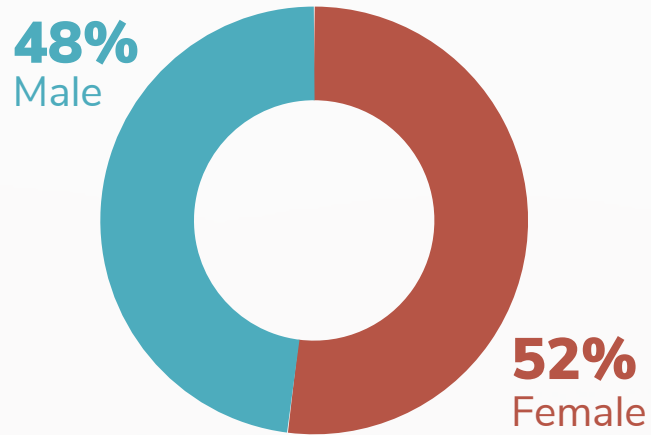
Type of personal protection	% who use it (2021)	% who use it (2020)
Security cameras	28%	25%
Dog or other guard animal	26%	33%
Firearms	26%	28%
Security system	25%	24%
Security bars or doors	8%	9%
Panic room	2%	2%
Other	5%	5%
None of the above/prefer not to say	38%	34%

Interesting findings

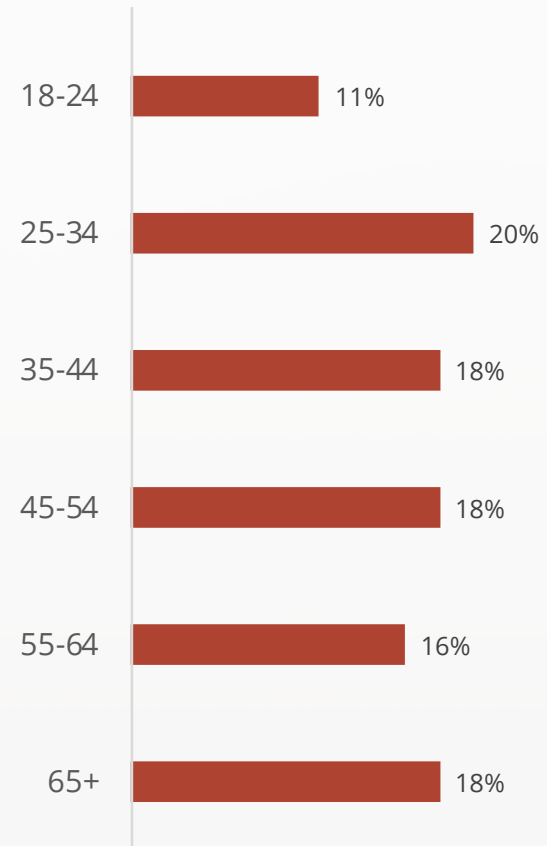
- Men, people with children, and 18–34-year-olds are most likely to use some type of property protection measure, although those aged 35–54 are only 1 percentage point behind the 18–34 age group.
- Men are 36% more likely than women to use firearms to protect their property and 45% more likely to have a home security system.
- Women are 17% more likely to use no security measure to protect their property.
- People in the southern US use property security measures the most, with firearms and security systems tied for the most-used type of property protection.
- Households with children use property security measures the most—54% more than households with no children—and guard dogs (or other animals) are the most common type of protection used.

Demographics

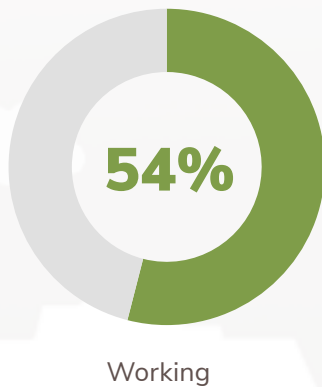
Gender



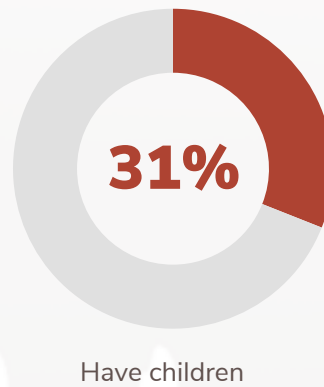
Age



Employment



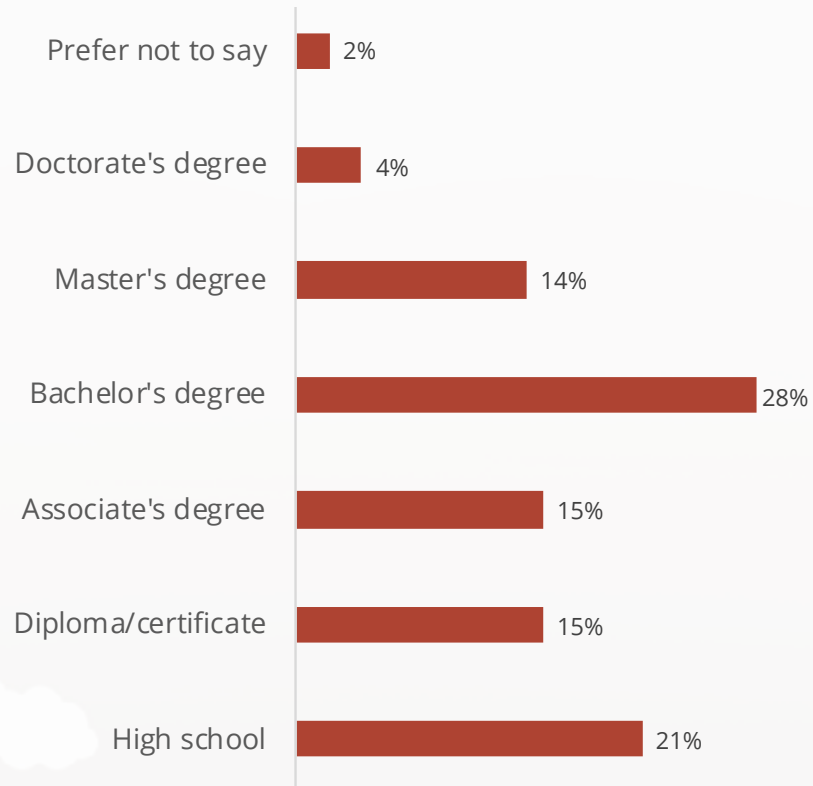
Household composition



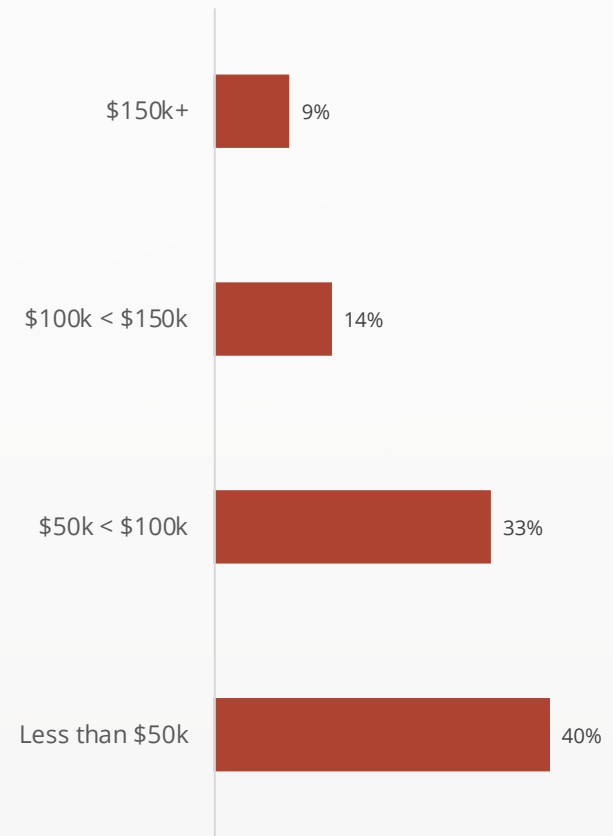
A4. Which gender do you identify as? / A3HV. Age groups / Z1. Which of the following best represents your household? // Z3. Which of the following best represents your current employment status? Among all respondents, 5026n

Demographics

Education



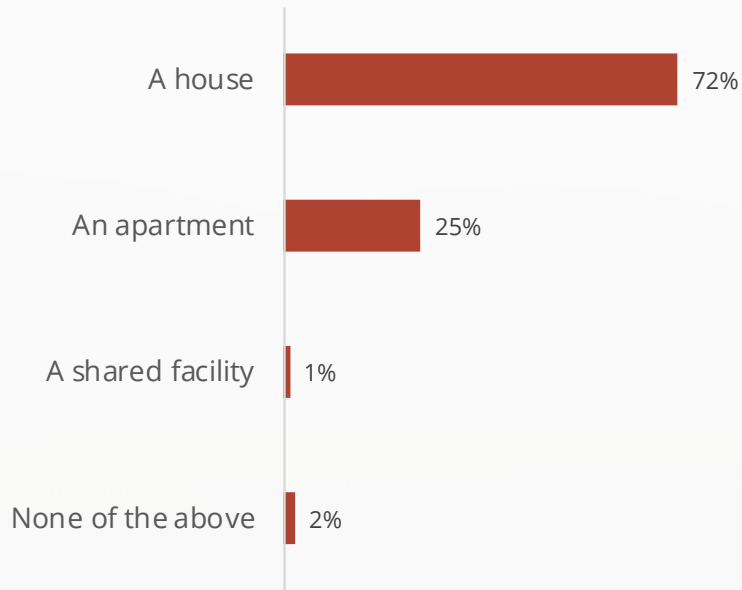
Income



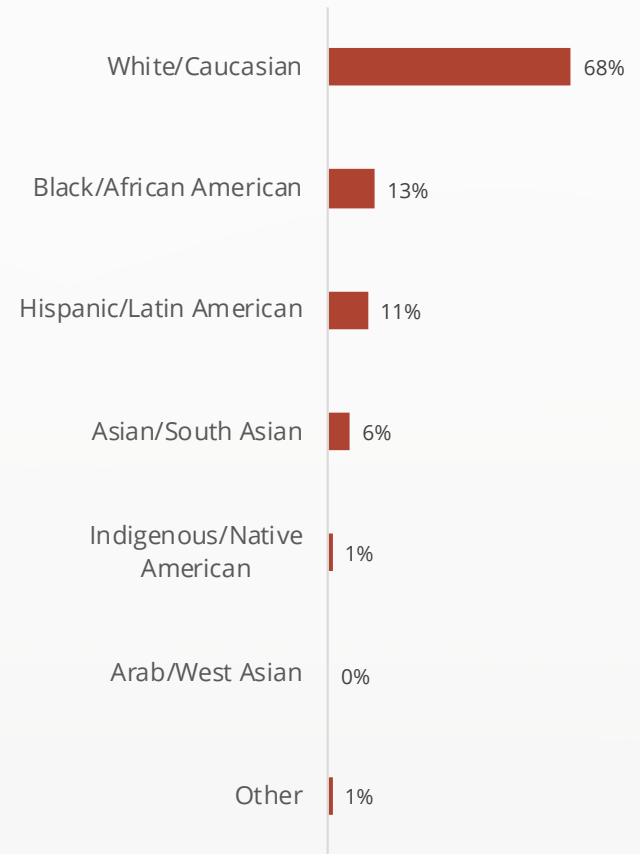
A7. Which of the following best represents your total annual household income before taxes? / Z2. What is the highest level of education you have completed? If you are currently enrolled, please select the highest degree you have received.

Demographics

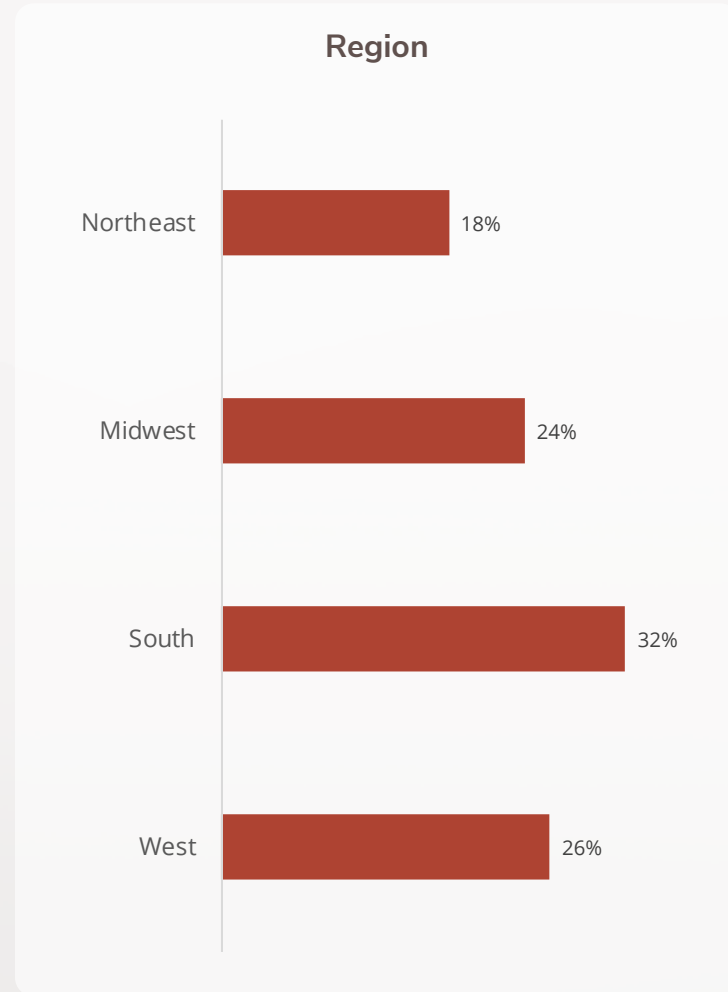
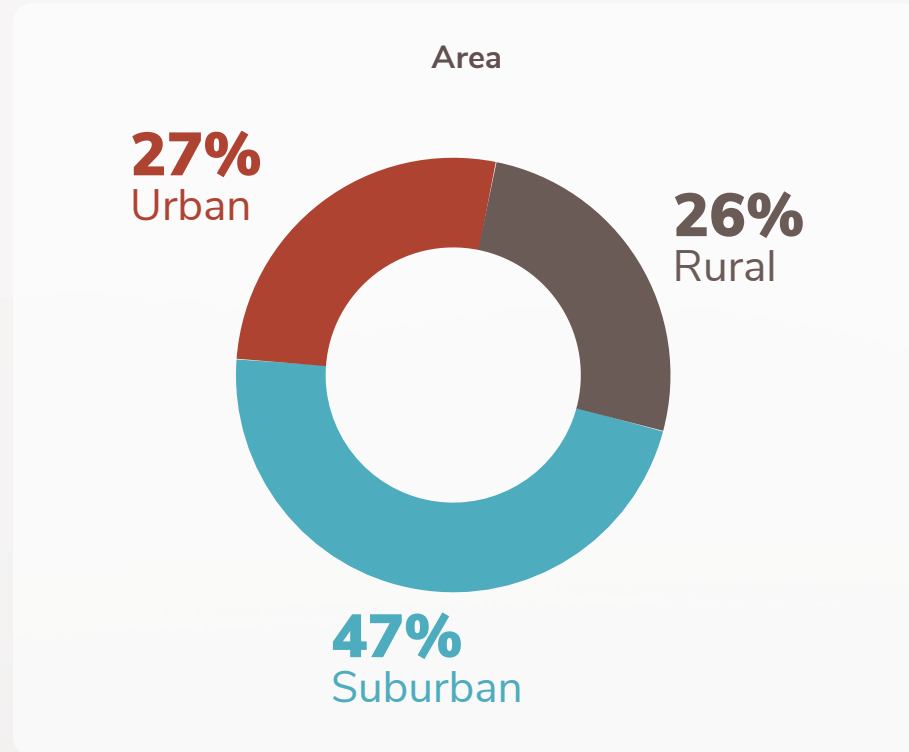
Type of residence



Ethnicity



Demographics



Emerging trends

For the third consecutive year, we noticed a gap between what people think and feel about crime and safety and what crime rates and statistics indicate. We also continued to see a disconnect between the levels of concern and the proactive measures that Americans take to enhance their safety. Here are some of the most impactful trends we noticed.

COVID-19, civil unrest, and rising gun violence

We expected to see a big jump in overall concern during our 2021 survey but were surprised to see the nominal impact daily headlines had on Americans' overall sense of safety and daily levels of concern.

- 6 in 10 respondents worry about the pandemic on a daily basis—a significant increase from the 4 in 10 that were worried about their health and wellness in our 2019 survey.
- The nation's violent crime rate held steady year over year (crime data 2018–2019), but due to record-breaking numbers of gun-related incidents throughout 2020, we expect to see the first spike in years when the FBI releases its final 2020 crime data.
- Despite national reports of record gun sales, fewer respondents told us they use a firearm for protection. Use of firearms for personal protection slipped 3% year over year and 7% fewer respondents are using them to secure their homes.
- For the first time, we received multiple comments about people observing and hearing gunshots in their neighborhood.
- In the midst of ongoing civil unrest, nearly 6 in 10 Americans are confident in law enforcement's approach to crime prevention, while one-third are likely to call someone other than the police in a non-emergency situation.

Proactive vs. reactive security

We recommend a balanced approach to home and personal security—one that combines proactive (preventative) measures like personal alarms and security systems with more reactive (in-the-moment) measures like self-defense weapons. This year, we saw an uptick in Americans' adoption of proactive security measures for both property and personal protection.

- Even though nearly 7 in 10 Americans think crime is on the rise, the same number doesn't use any type of personal or property protection.
- Use of property security measures dropped 6% year over year while use of personal protection measures remained unchanged.
- Use of security cameras and home security systems grew year over year, eclipsing Americans' preference for guard animals and firearms, which both dropped in use.
- Knives fell out of favor (dropping 12% year over year), with more Americans carrying pepper spray or a firearm for personal protection this year.
- Rape whistles and personal alarms saw the biggest jump in use, rising 18% year over year.
- With civil unrest continuing into 2021, we're curious to see if adoption of personal security measures continues to increase.

"It scares me that we live out in the country and if someone breaks in it will take the police a long time to get here."—Colorado respondent

"I live in an apartment complex that is open and does not employ any security measures. I mostly worry about outsiders and strangers that visit." —Mississippi respondent

Trends spotted in survey comments

Each year we pore over thousands of comments and insights submitted by State of Safety survey respondents. These spontaneous answers help us craft our report and design follow-up surveys and coverage. Here are some of the emerging trends we spotted in this year's comments:

- Digital safety and security continues to be top of mind for many Americans.
- Concern about things that may lead to crime was prominent. People expressed worry about rising unemployment, drug use, job and housing insecurity, and civil unrest.
- Concern about family members across the lifespan—worry about the safety of both children and older family members.
- Anxiety about security in apartments and apartment complexes was high.
- Respondents showed high concern about driving and road safety.
- More language showing fear of younger people, often referring to youth as “thugs” or “hoodlums.”
- Rising anxiety about urban settings versus rural and suburban settings. Concern ranges from things like protests and riots to the availability of law enforcement or other emergency help.

“Maintaining health in the time of COVID—[I have] worries about elderly parents, family, and friends.” —Idaho respondent

“[I worry about] racism on and off campus in a southern state, and living in a rural area without neighbors.” —Arkansas respondent

In conclusion

Gulfs still remain between Americans' perception of crime, worry about safety, and the actions they take to enhance their safety. Narrowing those gaps is part of our mission.

If you'd like to take a deeper dive into this study or find out the full results for any state, please contact us. We'd love to engage with you about how we can help create a safer world—from far-reaching national issues to everyday safety at home.

Join the conversation

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[Book an interview with one of our safety experts or email \[media@safewise.com\]\(mailto:media@safewise.com\)](#)

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