Do you feel safe?

July 2022
INTRODUCTION

In collaboration with the Center for a New American Security, More in Common surveyed a research panel on their perceptions of threats and safety in the US. Data collection was from June 23rd-30th, one month after the Uvalde mass shooting. Data collection also overlapped with the date (June 24th) that the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Americans are most concerned about mass shootings and gun violence. In free responses, many mentioned they also worry about struggling to make ends meet, being able to afford healthcare, and democracy waning.

2. 7 out of 10 Americans feel their country is under threat. They had diverse reasons, but many revolve around extremism, gun violence, and recent laws passed in the U.S.

3. Americans who identified with minority social groups felt their social group was under threat. For example, almost 8 in 10 Black Americans felt their racial group was under threat.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Americans in Conversation online platform

Results are shown as “American respondents.”

More in Common stood up an online community representative of the general population. From June 23 – June 30, we surveyed these American respondents about their perceptions of various threats and thoughts about safety. A total of N = 262 American respondents completed the survey questions.

For quantitative findings, the margin of error is +/- 6% for the US average and higher for subgroups.

For qualitative findings, responses to open-ended questions were aggregated, analyzed, and then reviewed for representative quotes that illustrate key sentiments on the subjects studied. Where provided, names have been changed to protect the privacy of the respondent.

Research Goals

• Explore how much Americans were concerned about various threats.

• Explore how frequently Americans think about safety, and what agencies Americans thought were responsible for safety.

• Explore what kinds of social identity threat Americans were concerned about.
How respondents felt about threats
Americans were most concerned about mass shootings and gun violence, and least concerned about riots and losing abortion access. However, most threats did not differ from each other.

"On a day-to-day basis, how concerned are you about the following threats?"
For some threats, Hidden Tribes diverged in how concerned they were.

"On a day-to-day basis, how concerned are you about the following threats?"
Women were more concerned than men about most threats.

"On a day to day basis, how concerned are you about the following threats?"
Being high in Social Dominance predicts lower threat perception for many threats.

Social Dominance is the belief that there should be a social hierarchy and that one’s ingroup should be dominant.

Social Dominance was measured with the SDO7 scale (Ho et al., 2015).

Question: “On a day-to-day basis, how concerned are you about the following threats?”

Riots ($r = -.03$) not shown.

*** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$. Points are jittered. Shade areas represent 95% confidence intervals.
When asked what threats were most concerning, gun violence (16%) and mass shootings (14%) were dominant in their ranking over other threats (7% and lower).

"Out of this list, what threat is most concerning to you?"
However, again threat perception varied across subgroups. For example, mass shootings, robberies, and climate damage were most polarized by political affiliation.

"Out of this list, what threat is most concerning to you?"
Many respondents fear the prospect of a mass shooting occurring to them or a loved one.

“Without assistance from the Government, I wouldn’t have health insurance. If they took that away from me, then I wouldn’t be able to afford health care.”
— Kitty, age 35–44 White female, Passive Liberal, Virginia

“I have children who attend school, and it’s horrifying to me that we have to send our kids off every day and wonder whether or not they'll make it home.”
— Karena, age 45–54 White female, Traditional Liberal, Indiana

Respondents also show concern for basic healthcare, and many feel insecure with their health status and ability to afford care.

“I just don’t understand why we are not stricter on gun ownership. It seems we are not safe from gun shootings no matter where we are or who we are.”
— Rachel, age 65+ White female, Traditional Conservative, Iowa

Some respondents are concerned about democracy waning.

“While many of the issues are immediate, [democracy waning] is the largest threat and the scariest. If we lose this democracy, the rest of the stuff has no chance.”
— Mary, age 45–54 White female, Traditional Liberal, North Carolina

Survey question: Out of this list, what threat is most concerning to you? Please explain.
Others are concerned about China’s growing influence, as well as basic necessities such as childcare and stable housing.

Some respondents express concern for China’s growing global influence.

“China’s influence in the world has grown dramatically in the last 20 years. We are far too dependent on them for manufacturing, and their military is growing very quickly to match ours. We need to recognize them for the threat that they are. They want to take over the world, and we cannot let that happen.”
— Felix, age 65+ White male, Traditional Conservative, North Carolina

Many respondents are simply struggling to make ends meet.

“I have concern for all of these but not on a daily basis. Right now, the most concerning for me is the fact that I am having trouble feeding and clothing my children and keeping a roof over their heads. We can’t afford anything.”
— Alice, age 18–24 White female, Traditional Liberal, Illinois

“I’ve been looking for good mental health care for the past two years. It is so hard to find services. I am still waiting. I live in a drug infested place that is not handicapped accessible for my disabled veteran husband. I have tons of student loan debt and no chance of being able to find affordable housing in the next two years. I am really stressed.”
— Jean, age 45–54 Hispanic female, Traditional Liberal, Massachusetts

Survey question: Out of this list, what threat is most concerning to you? Please explain.
How respondents felt about safety
About 7 in 10 respondents said the local police, state law enforcement agencies, and Department of Homeland Security were responsible for ensuring security and safety.
About 4 in 10 respondents think about the personal safety of their own or their friends and family every day. Black Americans thought about personal safety more frequently than the average respondent.

% of respondents who think about their personal safety every day.

"How often do you think about your personal safety? How often do you think about the personal safety of your family or friends?"
Respondents who feel that their safety is in jeopardy daily say that racially-motivated attacks and a general sense of dread explains their lack of feeling safe.

Some respondents mention that minorities in America face increased danger from all sorts of violent and criminal acts.

“I feel this way because black and brown people do not receive the same respect for their lives. Black men are shot at a much higher rate than non-black men breaking the same laws. Both groups should have the same consequences—but we know that doesn’t happen.” — Joyce, age 45-54 Black female, Moderate, Florida

“I think about my personal safety every day because of the increase of hate crimes, mass shootings, discrimination, etc. on African American, Asian American, and Hispanic people.” — Ellen, age 45-54 Black female, Traditional Conservative, Alabama

Some participants simply express a constant feeling of dread for the constant moment.

“Probably the false sense of danger that comes from listening to the news. I think society is unravelling, and I am concerned about my family becoming victim to dangerous people.” — Jim, age 35-44 White male, Traditional Liberal, Georgia

“The world is so unsafe. Everyone is against each other.” — Katheryn, age 45-54 Black female, Passive Liberal, Indiana

Survey question: If you answered “every day” to either of the above, what leads you to feel this way?
Many respondents mention the rise in gun violence and crime and how it leads to a sense of anxiety when they or a loved one is in public.

Respondents mention the uptick in gun violence and crime.

“You can’t take safety for granted – I live in a fairly safe area, but violence is sometimes random, and you just never know. I probably think about this much more than a man in my position would.” — Karena, age 45–54, White female, Traditional Liberal, Indiana

“We have more crime than we’ve ever had. I worry about everyone staying safe and wonder how the crime will stop. When we have people letting in thousands of foreigners without checking them out, they are putting you and your family in danger.” — Sylvia, age 65+, White female, Moderate, Connecticut

Some respondents note a feeling of uncertain anxiety that random violence could occur at any moment in a public space.

“The gun violence is really getting out of control. Also, more criminals are walking the streets because of bail reform. We have to be very aware of our surroundings.” — Priscilla, age 55–64, Asian female, Disengaged, New York

“Any time I’m in public with my kids and see something that seems a little off the thought goes through my head. We had a fire alarm go off the last day of school. We all knew it was unplanned because it was right before dismissal. Many teachers had the same thought – is there an intruder? It turned out to be a faulty sensor...but you just never know these days.” — Della, age 65+, White female, Traditional Liberal, North Dakota

Survey question: If you answered ”every day” to either of the above, what leads you to feel this way?
How respondents felt about social threats
7 in 10
Respondents agreed with the statement, “My country is under threat.”
Agreement with “My country is under threat” was more than 50% across almost all subgroup analyses.
Almost 6 in 10 women agreed with “My gender is under threat.” Under 3 in 10 men agreed.
Almost 8 in 10 Black Americans agreed with “My racial or ethnic group is under threat,” twice the proportion of the average respondent.

% agreeing with “My racial or ethnic group is under threat.”

- Black or African American: 78%
- Average: 37%
Agreement with “My family is under threat” varied most by race. More than 1 out of 2 Black Americans agreed, while only 1 out of 4 White Americans agreed.
Surprisingly, agreement with “My political group is under threat” did not vary much by political affiliation. Hidden Tribes segmentation showed more variation.
Only 1 in 4 respondents agreed with “My religion is under threat.” This differed by political affiliation and Hidden Tribe.
Respondents express diverse reasons for feeling under threat, but many revolve around extremism, gun violence, and recent laws passed in the U.S.

Respondents mention how recent Supreme Court rulings have made them feel that they are under threat.

“My religion, which is the absence of religion and desire for secular government, is under threat as evident by recent Supreme Court rulings.”
— Jim, age 35–44 White male, Traditional Liberal, Georgia

“I think women are under threat with the overturning of Roe v. Wade.”
— Karena, age 45–54 White female, Traditional Liberal, Indiana

Respondents feel that polarization and extremism in politics is threatening democracy.

“I see radical political groups becoming more prevalent in "normal" politics and society. I feel our country is under threat from right wing extremist groups who want to impose conservative Christian values on everyone.” — Bernard, age 35–44 Hispanic male, Progressive Activist, Colorado

“Our democracy is being assaulted on multiple fronts, and I’m very concerned for our future. People seem to be becoming nastier and more polarized.” — Bob, age 45–54 White male, Progressive Activist, North Carolina

Survey question: If you agreed strongly with any of these statements [statements on feeling under threat], why do you feel this way?
Some respondents feel that their particular racial or political group is under threat and is unfairly stereotyped or discriminated against.

“The strongest threat I feel is for my country. I am really not associated with a political group, but as for being conservative, at times I feel that people just really want to attack us for just wanting to believe what we believe. At times it feels like my way of life is under threat or attack (not physically, maybe psychologically). I am an average, low-income, white, female, Christian, stay-at-home mom and every day I see things on the internet and television that suggest I am a privileged, uneducated, lazy person that has not lived up to her potential. I just don’t feel that way. I like who I am, but it just seems like there aren’t many of us out here because it’s not acceptable.” — Joanne, age 45–54 White female, Moderate, Mississippi

“I think people continue to see diaspora Asians as foreigners regardless of citizenship, where we were born and raised, etc.... As inflation continues, I think some Americans will place more blame on Chinese nationals that have purchased real estate in the U.S. because have certain feelings against Asian Americans for having higher average household incomes... To them, there may not be any difference between me, the Chinese government, and Chinese nationals. It might not matter to them that I was born and raised in the U.S., that I’ve never stepped foot in China, that I also have family and ancestors from Taiwan... To these people, I may not deserve the same rights that Americans should have and instead am the target of their frustration.” — Carmela, age 25–34 Asian female, Traditional Liberal, Washington
Some nonwhite respondents think that their group is targeted based on their race and feel a lack of safety.

Asian Americans are concerned about discrimination and violence against them due to the perceptions some Americans have about the origin of Covid-19.

“When people look at me, they immediately judge me and hate me because of my race. People think COVID came from every Asian living in the US.”
— Corrine, age 45-54, Asian female, Traditional Conservative, Texas

“My children are multiracial and I fear for their safety when they are walking with an old Asian lady (me). Being old and Asian is now a target group for assault/robbery.”
— Kathryn, age 65+, Asian female, Traditional Conservative, California

Survey question: If you identify as Multiracial or multiethnic, please elaborate on your response to the statement “My racial or ethnic group is under threat.”
Some members from other racial groups feel that they are given non-preferential treatment.

One respondent mentioned how society seems more concerned about the well-being of certain racial groups.

Some think that their racial group is treated unfairly. One respondent thinks that part of the explanation for racial groups feeling threatened is hypersensitivity.

“I am white and Mexican. Mexicans are often overlooked by society as a whole. Society is more concerned with BLM instead of any other race.”
— Amelia, age 35–44 White female, Moderate, California

“It may seem odd, but as a white male I feel under threat. Everybody is giving benefits, reparations and special treatment to non-white males; I feel like we're being steamrolled. Stop paying back, just treat everybody the same going forward!”
— Roland, age 55–64 White male, Disengaged, California

“I feel all racial groups are under threat because everyone is hypersensitive: whites feel outnumbered, Hispanics and Asians feel targeted, Blacks feel that they are racial profiled.”
— Mattie, age 35–44 Hispanic female, Traditional Conservative, Ohio
Thank You