

The End of the World

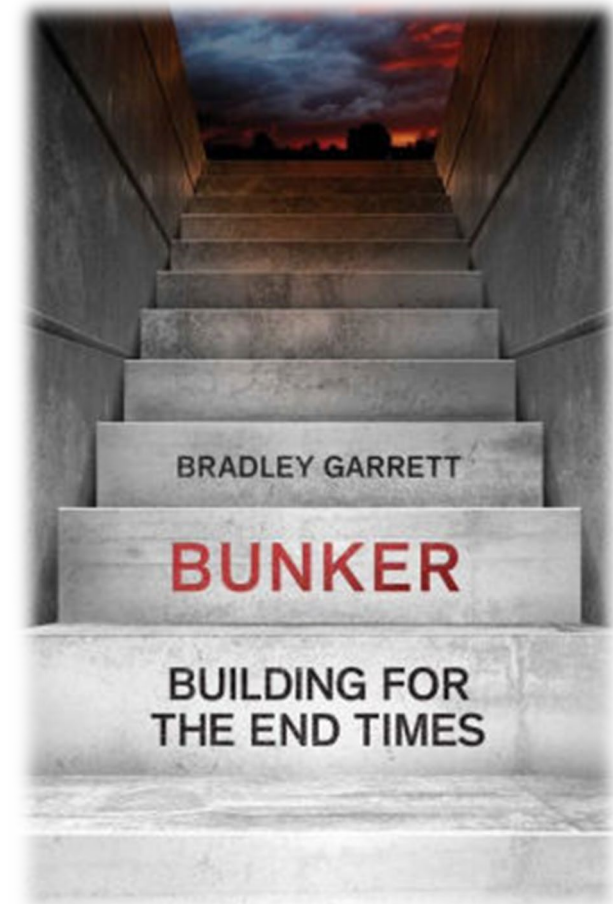
An Introduction to Prepper Culture



According to *Bunker* author Bradley Garrett, around 4 million people living in the US (or 1.2 %) consider themselves “preppers,” or people who are actively preparing for a wide range of disaster scenarios.

Although the term “prepper” has a relatively recent origin, the idea of people preparing for a variety of possible disaster scenarios is ancient. What is of interest to us is the emergence of a “prepper subculture” in contemporary US society, and the story behind this cultural phenomenon.

“Bunkers have always been existential places: earthly wombs from which to be reborn. When resurrection becomes impossible, bunkers become tombs. Safe crossing through periods of danger and instability requires having a destination plotted in the future and making it to that destination by weathering the psychological and social hurdles of lockdown. Although you aren’t guaranteed resurrection if you build and stock a bunker, you’re seriously diminishing your chances of making it through these periods of turmoil if you don’t.”

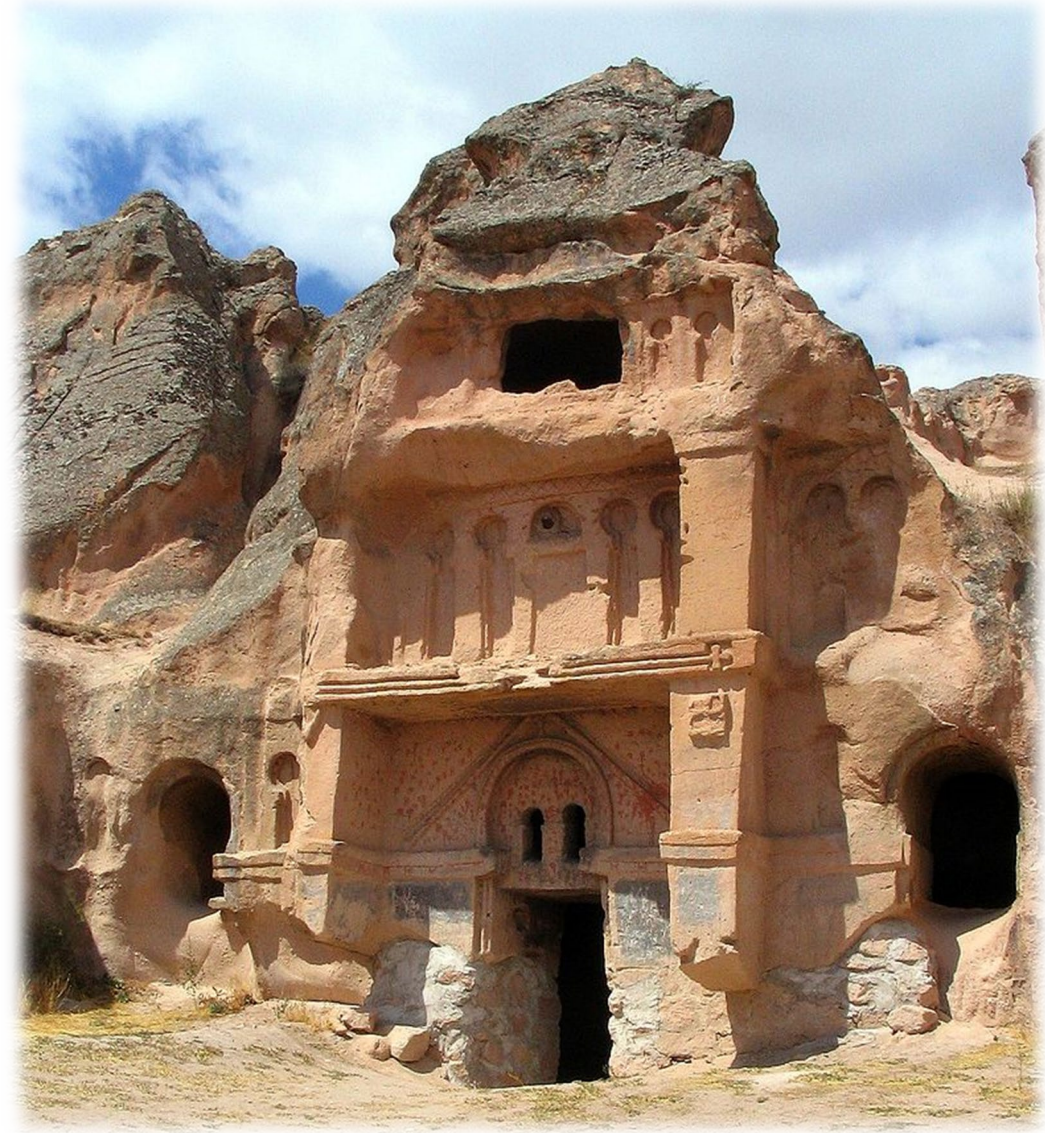




Göreme National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Cappadocia, Turkey. Rock carved dwellings dating back to the Hittite era (~1,200 BCE), and with extensive use during the Roman era.



“Fairy chimneys” carved into stone in Cappadocia, Turkey



Entrance to carved church in Cappadocia, Turkey

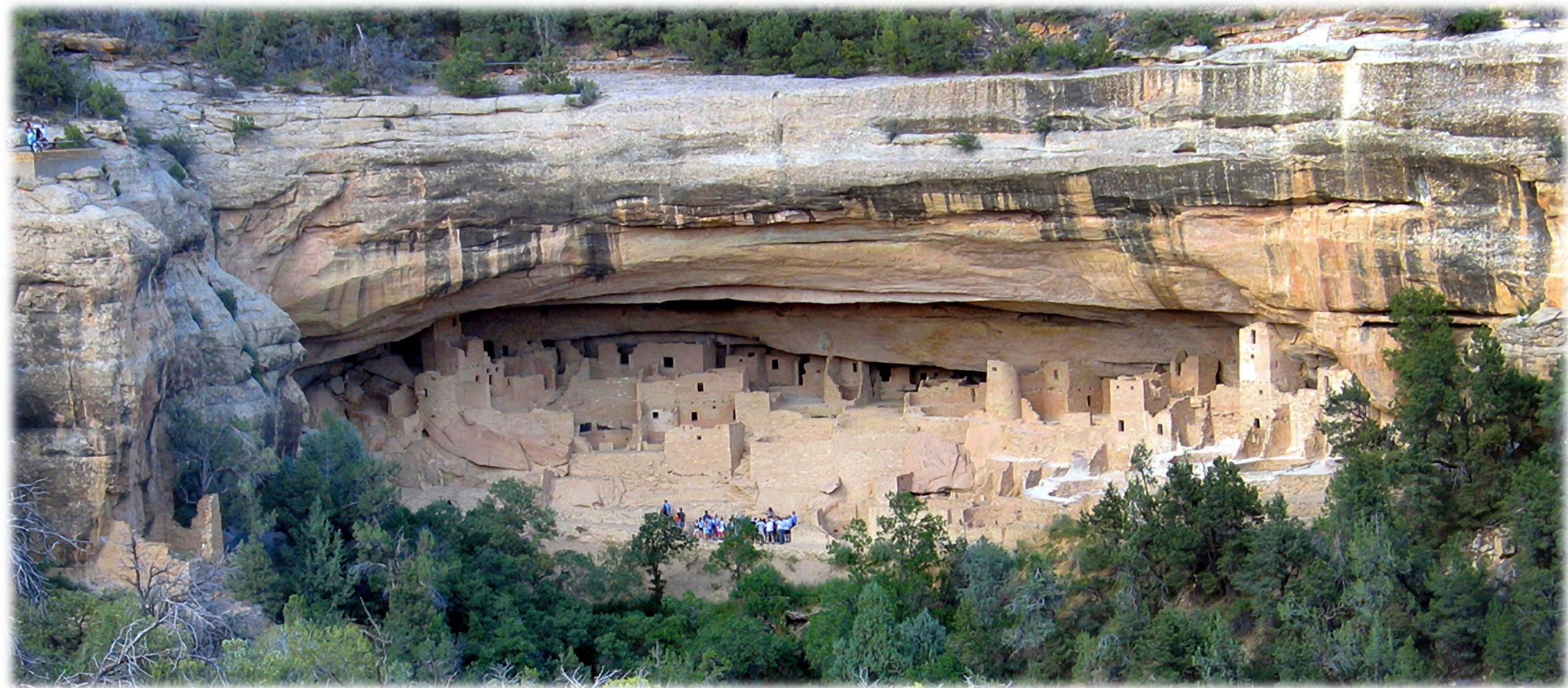


Kaymakli Underground City in Cappadocia, Turkey. Later used by 1st century Christians to hide from the Romans.

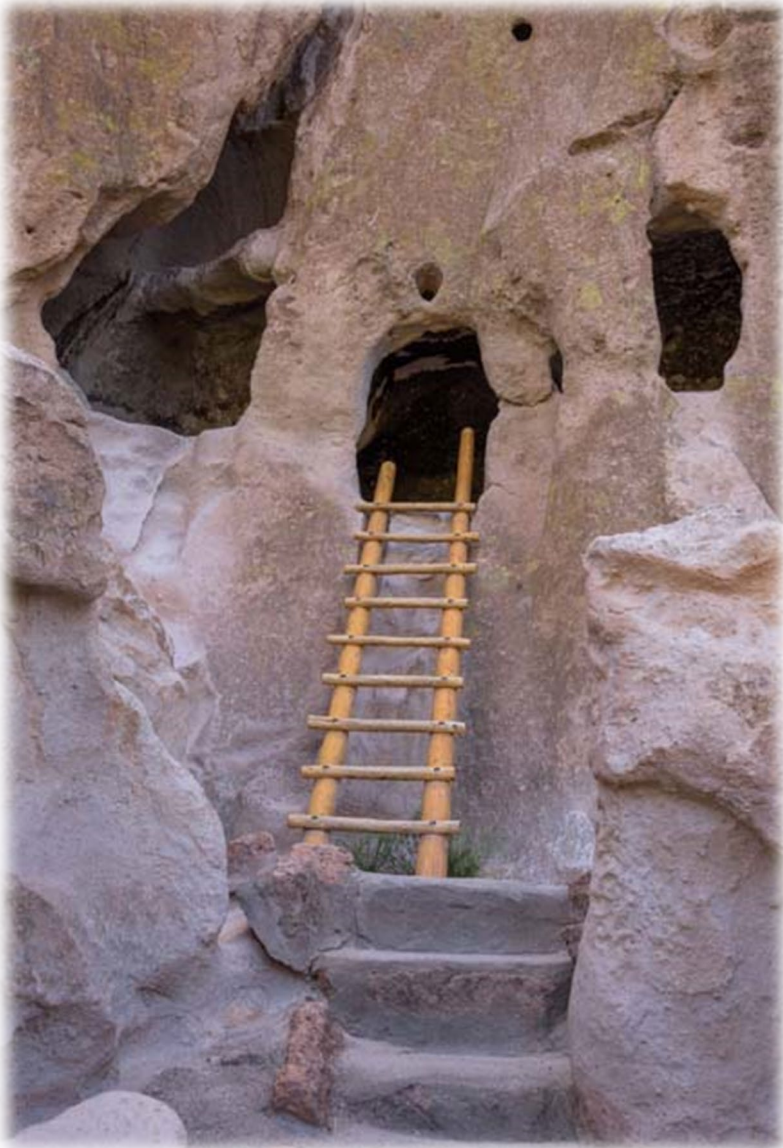


dicksstevens.com

Real Stories EUROPE



Mesa Verde National Park in southwest Colorado with structures built by the Ancestral Puebloans/Anasazi over 1,000 years ago.



Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico with cliff caves and dwelling built by the Ancestral Puebloans/Anasazi over 1,000 years ago.



Reconstructed *kiva* showing inside space.

Examples of a Hopi *kiva* at the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. *Kivas* are subterranean structures used for religious rituals and community gatherings.



Bunker B-207, where Bradley Garrett spent several days during xFest.

The Vivos xPoint compound in South Dakota run by Robert Vicino.

The origins of bunkers can be traced to natural caves, and then later man-made carved spaces, such as the example of the underground city of Kaymakli in central Anatolia.

As Garrett notes, the emergence of bunkers paralleled the shift from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles. As people began to settle down, there was a need to provide protection and storage.

Bunkers serve two primary functions:

- **Personal safety and protection (physical)**
- **A place from which to rebuild (social)**

But Garrett argues there is something new about the “hardened architecture” of our modern bunker, embodied in increasing gated communities, panic rooms, and shooter-proof schools. These examples represent a kind of social breakdown or what he calls an “architecture of dread.”

“In this respect, the bunker is a metaphorical space as much as an architectural one: an expression of our twenty-first century anxieties and insecurities, a reflection of the way we see the world and each other.”

Equally important, the tendency for a growing number of individuals to build their own private bunkers signals a breaking down of society, a trend that is fueled by growing social inequities.

The bomb shelter under President Trump's Mar-A-Lago resort or former President Kennedy's nuclear bunker on Peanut Island were built as a response to wartime threats (Korean War and Cold War), but bunkers today are not a response to a single impending threat, but to a host of possible threats.

Modern motivations for building a bunker might include:

- Political unrest due to financial collapse
- Government imposed martial law/Civil war
- Nuclear/Biological/Chemical attack
- Foreign invasion
- Total power failure ("grid down")
- Natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes)
- Collapse of the global food system
- Global pandemic
- Extraterrestrial threats (asteroids, solar flares)
- Extinction level event ("ELE")



“Prepping isn’t just a result of contemporary conditions of social life, but a lens through which to perceive and understand those conditions.”

Some of these fears were embodied in the 2020 announcement by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to set the Doomsday Clock forward to 100 seconds till midnight, the closest it has ever been since the Doomsday Clock was created in 1947.

The Bulletin based their increased “doomsday” assessment on two primary factors:

- **Increased threat of nuclear conflicts**
- **Unchecked global climate change**

These threats, and many others that drive prepper (and scientist) fears, are partly due to the increasingly globalized and interconnected world we live in.

Possibility that we are now living through a Sixth Mass Extinction caused by a mix of human overpopulation, habitat destruction, and climate change.



Garrett argues that Geoscrapers, or subterranean structures like massive bunkers, may be the 21st century version of the urban skyscraper, built and structured around surveillance and control.

Dread vs Fear

“In other words, fear has an object. Dread does not. Whereas we fear people, objects, events, and things, dread is an ontological orientation we find ourselves in that cannot be attached to something specific. And it is, I believe, the dominant affect of our era.”

Although prepper culture tends to be dominated by more conservative individuals, there are preppers of all political and religious stripes from all walks of life living in all parts of the country. What unites preppers, he argues, was “an overwhelming dread about the future, and a desire to create secretive, defensive, and resilient spaces that are ultimately dread-resistant.”

We can think about prepper culture (and bunkers in general) as embodying a broad feeling that the world is spinning out of control. Preppers worry we are heading into an increasingly uncertain and dangerous future. One way to reclaim a sense of personal agency in the face of this dread is to actively prepare for disasters and the end of the world.

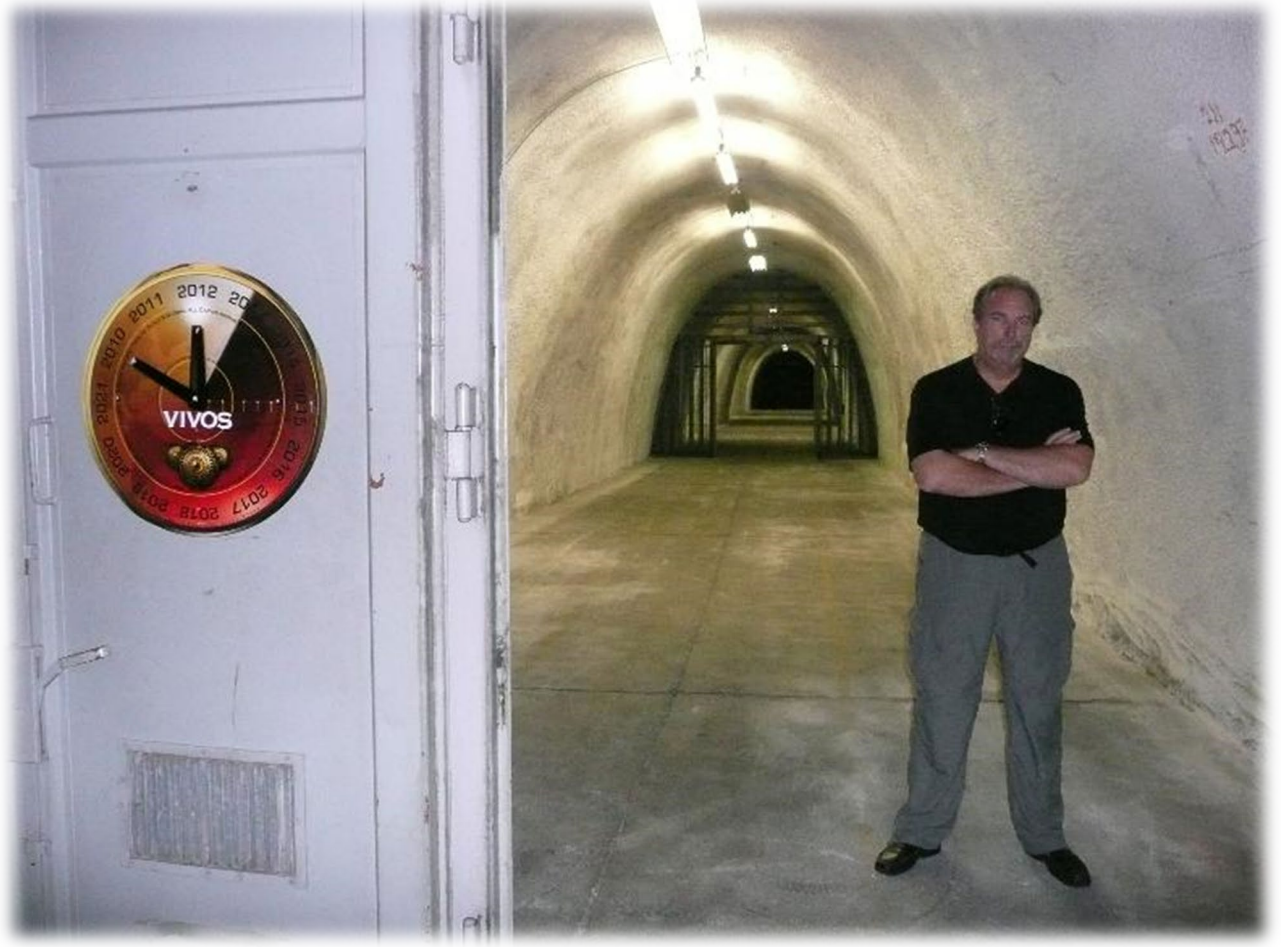
So we can see two different philosophical outlooks at work within US prepper communities.

- **People pull together to help each other during a disaster.**
- **People fend for themselves and see any outsiders as a threat.**

This first outlook is what author Rebecca Solnit calls “disaster solidarity” and we have seen many examples of this during natural disasters where neighbors help each other when in need.

The second outlook, more common among extreme preppers focused on security threats, is the “72 hours to animals” mentality where everyone outside your immediate group is a hostile threat. Some preppers refer to this as the “golden horde,” marauding bands of people coming to take everything you have and kill you (think Negan and the Savivors from the tv series *The Walking Dead*).

This second outlook tends to view any government disaster efforts with skepticism—as in the joke that FEMA really stands for ‘Foolishly Expecting Meaningful Aid.’ Such views are prevalent among the more militia-inclined preppers who are highly distrustful of government and politicians.



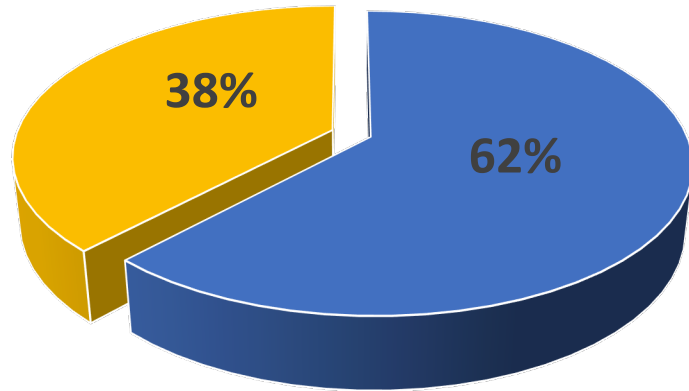
One of the “merchants of dread” that Garrett features is Robert Vicino, founder of the Vivos Group and operator of the Vivos xPoint facility in the former US Army Black Hills Ordnance Depot in South Dakota.

The goal of xPoint is to be able to survive a catastrophic event and then safely emerge, up to one year later, in what preppers often refer to as the post-apocalyptic world (PAW).



Disaster Planning & End Time Fears

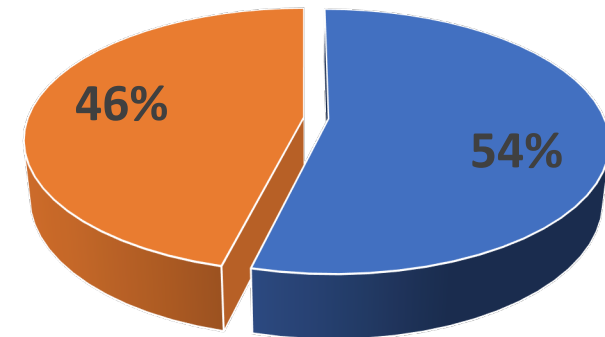
2012 National Geographic Survey



- World will experience major disaster in next 20 years
- World will not experience major disaster in next 20 years

40% of respondents also said stocking up on supplies or building a bunker was a better investment than saving for retirement.

2015 Academic Study (US, UK, Canada, Australia)

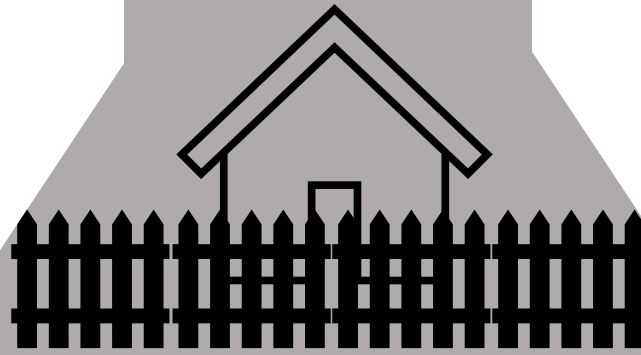


- >50% chance our way of life will end in next 100 years
- >50% chance our way of life won't end in next 100 years

25% of respondents also said there was a 50% chance of being wiped out in the next 100 years.



1/3 of new homes built in the US since 2000 were in gated communities.





St. Louis couple Mark and Patricia McCloskey threaten #BLM marchers for walking on a private street beside their home.

As Bradley Garrett noted about his experience with the preppers at xFest:

“I felt a sense of common ground with my companions around the bonfire. I might reach for Michel Foucault, and they for InfoWars, but we understood each other: we were all getting screwed by technology, corporations, and the government.”

As the Black Swan phenomenon discussed by NYU risk engineering professor Nassim Taleb suggests, there will always be unexpected risks that we cannot plan for. But what we do know, and preppers often highlight, that “the world is becoming more fragile because of its increasing complexity...”

For example, think about how much the current global Coronavirus pandemic has disrupted our daily lives and routines, and then imagine something 10 X worse happening on a regional or global scale, and we can begin to see why preppers are worried about global fragility (3 days of supplies).

As xPoint founder Robert Vicino reminded our Bradley Garrett:

“Nobody believed Noah until it was too late.”



How are professional preppers responding to COVID-19?



COVID-19 COVERAGE

WHAT IS PREPPING?



5:21
69°

...URING THIS TIME, ADMINISTRATIVE, INSTRUCTIONAL AND STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES WILL

LOCAL NEWS

▶ ⏪ 🔊 0:27 / 3:18

⏏ ⚙️ 📺 🔍

“Disasters Don’t Wait. Make Your Plan Today.”

September is National Emergency Preparedness Month, and this provides us a great opportunity to both think critically about questions of preparedness and assess our own preparedness for disaster.

Over the next four weeks that’s exactly what we’ll do, as we look at key elements of being prepared.

WEEK
1

Week 1 September 1-5: Make A Plan

Talk to your friends and family about how you will communicate before, during, and after a disaster. Make sure to update your plan based on the Centers for Disease Control recommendations due to the coronavirus.

WEEK
2

Week 2 September 6-12: Build A Kit

Gather supplies that will last for several days after a disaster for everyone living in your home. Don’t forget to consider the unique needs each person or pet may have in case you have to evacuate quickly. Update your kits and supplies based on recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control.

WEEK
3

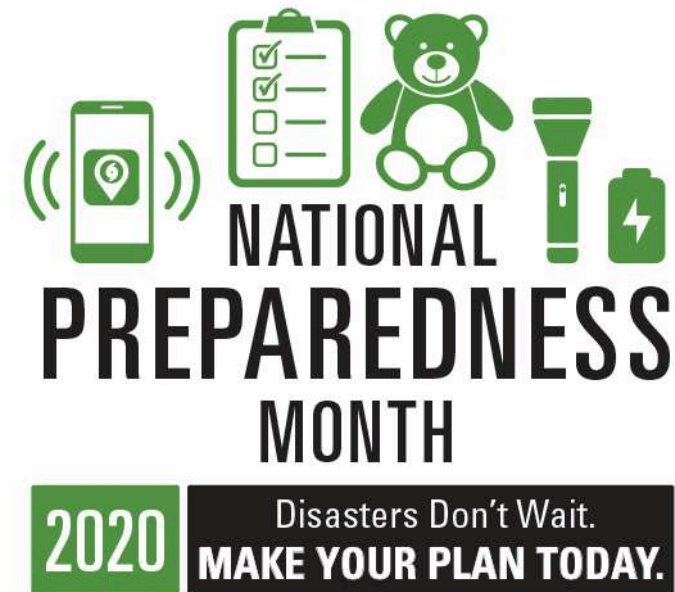
Week 3 September 13-19: Prepare for Disasters

Limit the impacts that disasters have on you and your family. Know the risk of disasters in your area and check your insurance coverage. Learn how to make your home stronger in the face of storms and other common hazards and act fast if you receive a local warning or alert.

WEEK
4

Week 4 September 20-26: Teach Youth About Preparedness

Talk to your kids about preparing for emergencies and what to do in case you are separated. Reassure them by providing information about how they can get involved.



#BeReady

Weekly Assignment Reminder

- Remember to check our class Blackboard regularly for updates, announcements, and other related class information...
- Have you done the weekly readings and watched any associated videos? Weekly readings are listed on the Class Schedule page.
- Complete the discussion post assignment “Make a Plan” for Week 2. Initial post due on Wed, Sept 2 by end of the day (11:59 pm PST) in Blackboard, and peer response post due on Fri Sept 4 by end of day.