

The End of the World



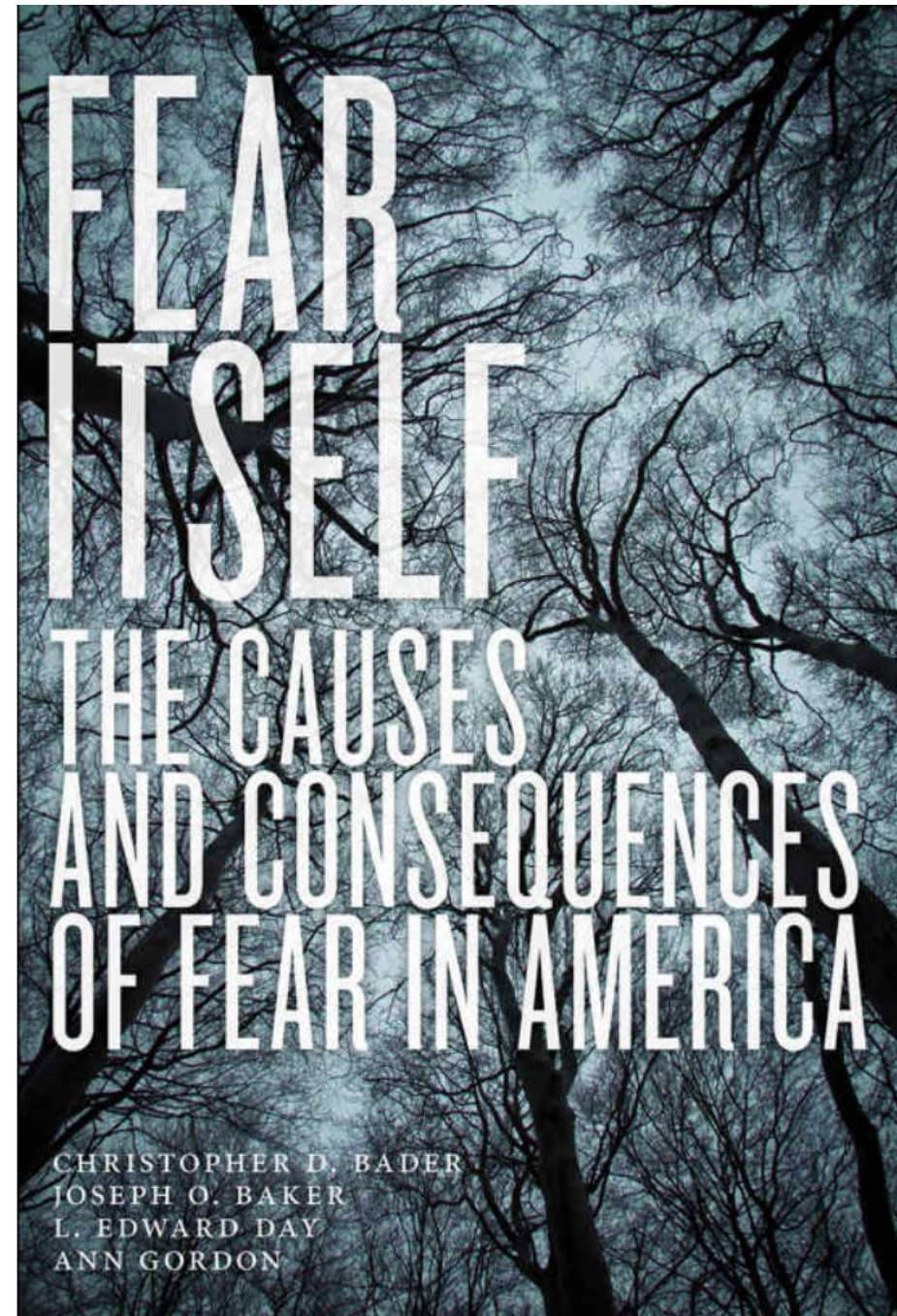
Apocalyptic Contagion
Disaster Prepping, Terrorism, and Mediated Fears

Week 6 Lecture | Professor Crews
Religious Studies 357 W

As Christopher Bader, Joseph Baker, L. Edward Day, and Ann Gordon make clear in their 2020 book *Fear Itself: The Causes and Consequences of Fear in America*, researchers are now beginning to gain a better understanding of precisely how fear shapes and informs American cultural beliefs and actions.

The underlying research in the book comes from the annual Chapman University Survey of American Fears (2014-2019), one of the most in-depth sociological study to date looking at a wide range of American fears, what informs these fears, and how these beliefs are affected by everything from race and gender to social media usage and paranormal beliefs.

As they note in the introduction, the goal of the study was to understand “[the patterns and consequences of fear](#)” and “[what kinds of Americans are afraid of certain things and how those fears are related to other beliefs and behaviors.](#)”



Having looked at the general landscape of American fears, and how conspiracy theories and belief in the paranormal have shaped public fears, we are now turning to some specific fears, including the global environmental crisis, disaster preparedness, terrorism, and crime, with a particular interest in the role of the media in communicating and heightening public fears.

One of the phenomenon we return to this week involves American preppers and fears about a variety of natural and man-made disasters, from climate change and financial collapse to a hostile EMP attack—a scenario prepper refer to as the “Shit Hits the Fan” (SHTF) where “You’re On Your Own” (YOYO).

Drawing on a visit to the annual Prepper Camp held in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, our authors discuss some of the end of the world scenarios that American preppers fear, with a SHTF situation caused by an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) being a dominant fear at the 2014 Prepper Camp. (The 2020 Prepper Camp just took place over the past weekend—Sept 25-27, 2020).

As the authors note, people from all walks of life attend Prepper Camp and are united in believing that “Americans are simply not ready for the next catastrophic disaster...the assessment by preppers about the general level of disaster preparedness in America is fairly accurate; we are not ready.”

A photograph of a house with a chimney, set against a sunset sky. The scene is dimly lit, with the sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow. The house is in the middle ground, and a large tree is visible to the right. The foreground is a dark, flat area, possibly a lawn or driveway. A white rectangular box with a thin black border is centered in the lower half of the image, containing the text 'DOOMSDAY PREPPERS' in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

DOOMSDAY PREPPERS

Top Excuses for Lack of Disaster Preparedness

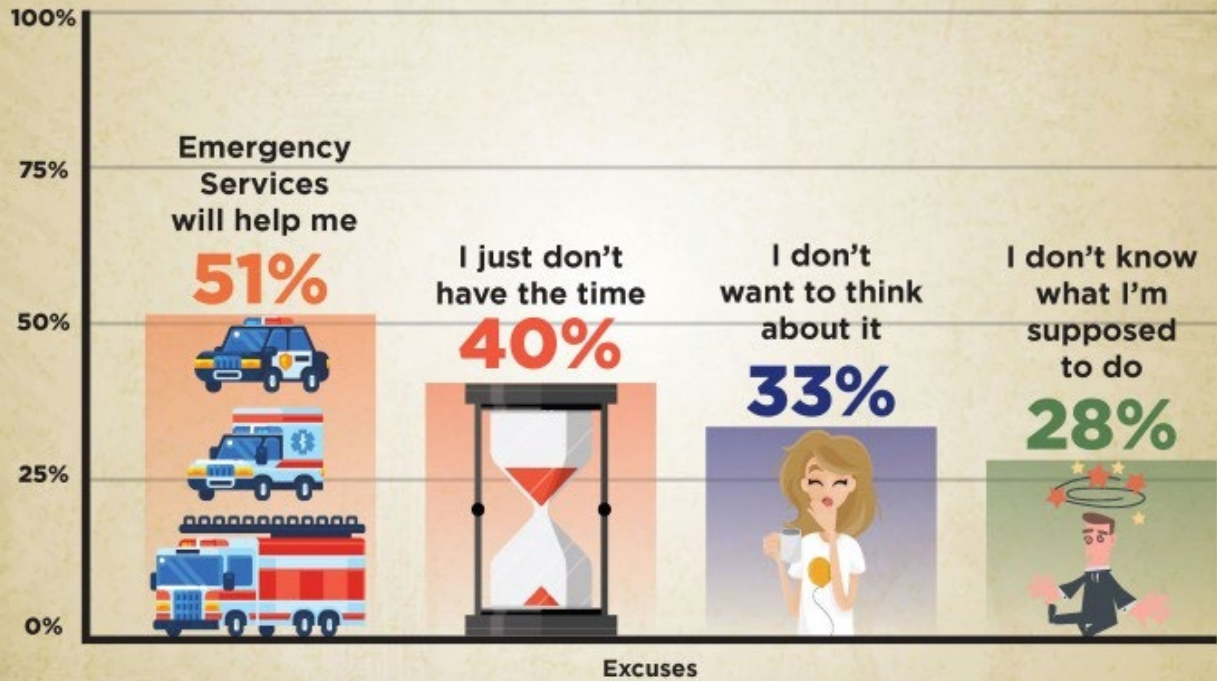


TABLE 3.1. Disaster Preparedness in America (2018).

Preparedness	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Emergency Kit—Yes	30%	18%	31%	26%	42%
Emergency Plan—Yes	36%	31%	36%	35%	40%
Improved chance of surviving with a kit	83%	76%	79%	85%	88%

Source: CSAF (2018).

Note: N = 1,190.

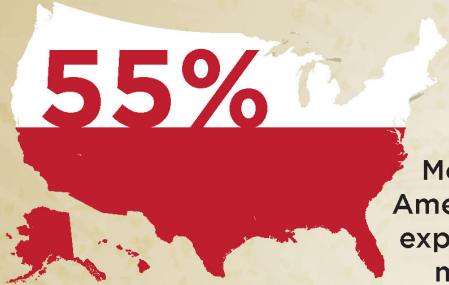
TABLE 3.2. Fear of Disasters (2018).

Natural Disasters	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Pandemic or Epidemic	39%	43%	30%	40%	38%
Devastating Drought	38%	43%	26%	35%	46%
Devastating Tornado	35%	29%	42%	42%	20%
Devastating Earthquake	31%	25%	20%	28%	46%
Devastating Flood	31%	29%	24%	36%	28%
Devastating Hurricane	33%	37%	12%	48%	21%
Devastating Blizzard	27%	39%	33%	23%	20%
Devastating Volcanic Eruption	19%	18%	13%	18%	21%
Man-Made Disasters	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Biological Warfare	45%	49%	42%	46%	45%
Financial Collapse	49%	54%	47%	50%	47%
Nuclear Weapon Attack	43%	50%	39%	44%	39%
Electrical Grid Collapse	39%	46%	37%	37%	38%

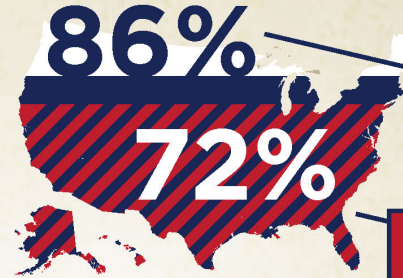
Source: Chapman University Survey of American Fears (2018).

Note: N = 1,190. Values shown are the percentages of respondents who reported being afraid or very afraid of each phenomenon.

Americans Need a Disaster Reality Check



More than half of all Americans fear they will experience a natural or manmade disaster.



Believe a **72 hour emergency kit** recommended by FEMA or the Red Cross would improve their chances of surviving a disaster.

Have made no effort to put together such a kit.

BASIC EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT



*One gallon of water per person per day

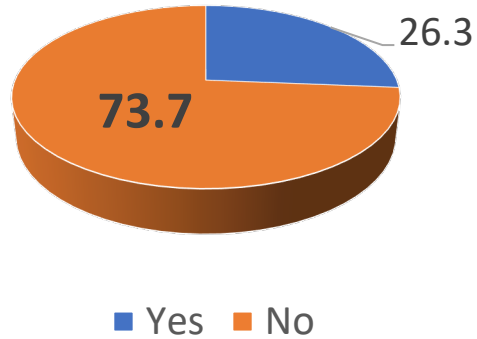
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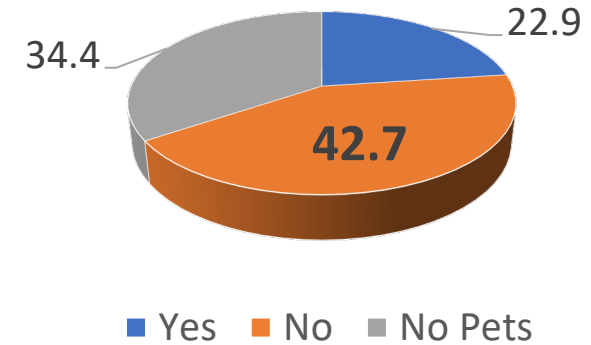
excuse given by Americans for not owning an **emergency kit** is that they expect first responders to come to their aid. This is an **unrealistic belief** in the wake of a major disaster.



Have you or anyone in your household put together a disaster or emergency supply kit, containing supplies such as food, water and medical supplies?

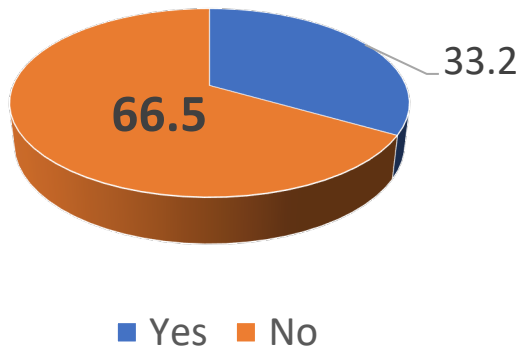


Have you or anyone in your household put together a plan for what you would do with your pet(s) in a natural disaster or emergency such as a fire in your home?

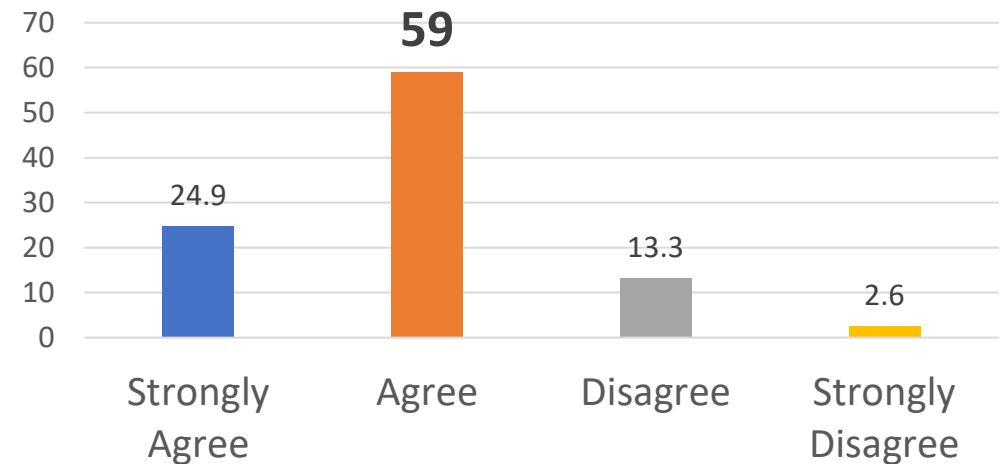


Chapman University Survey of American Fears (2019)

Have you or anyone in your household put together a plan for what you would do in a natural disaster or emergency such as a fire in your home?



By keeping an emergency supply kit, I am improving my chance of surviving a natural or manmade disaster.

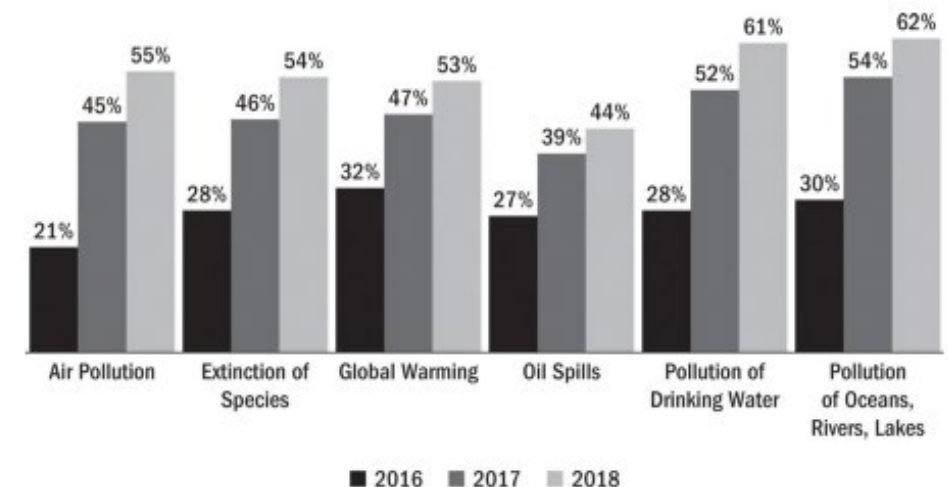


We see a growing overlap between environmental and prepper worries related to natural disasters, from flooding and fires to hurricanes and tornadoes. In addition, we see more interest in green technologies and lifestyles, from solar panels and off-grid electric systems to biodiesel and primitive living skills, ranging from beekeeping and rainwater harvesting to home gardening and food preservation.

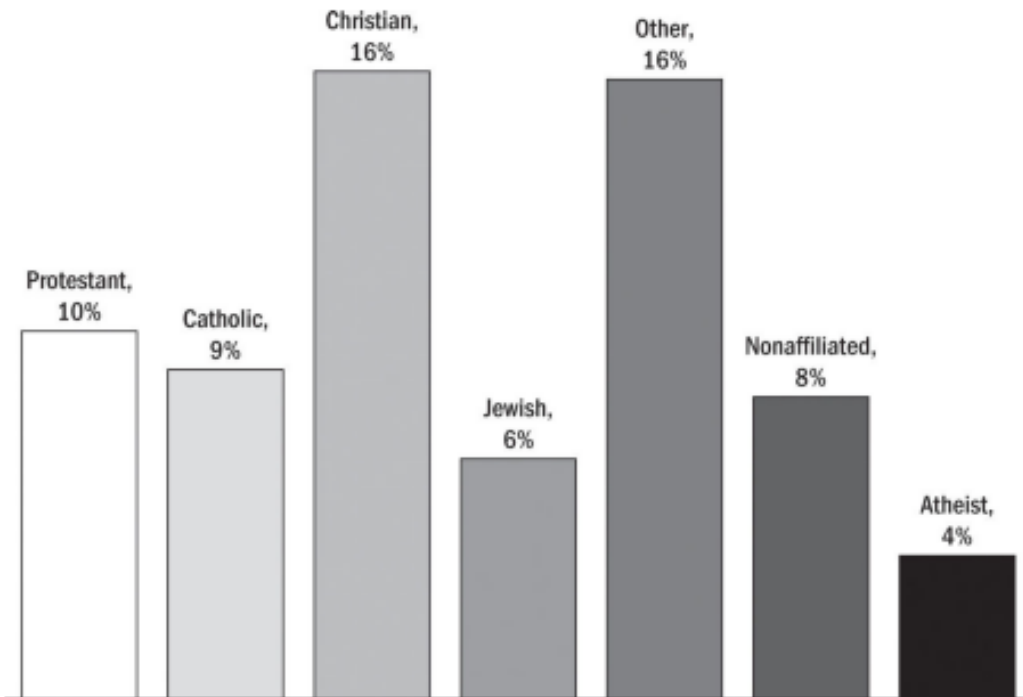
As we saw already from the Survey of American Fears, environmental issues represent 5 of the top 10 fears for Americans today. The authors suggest several key factors help explain this trend:

- Increasing worries from climate change (droughts, floods, fires, hurricanes)
- Increasing local environmental harms (polluted air/water – fracking in PA, PFAS in MI, toxic algae in OH)
- Administration hostile to environmental protection
- Increasing scientific evidence of global environmental risks

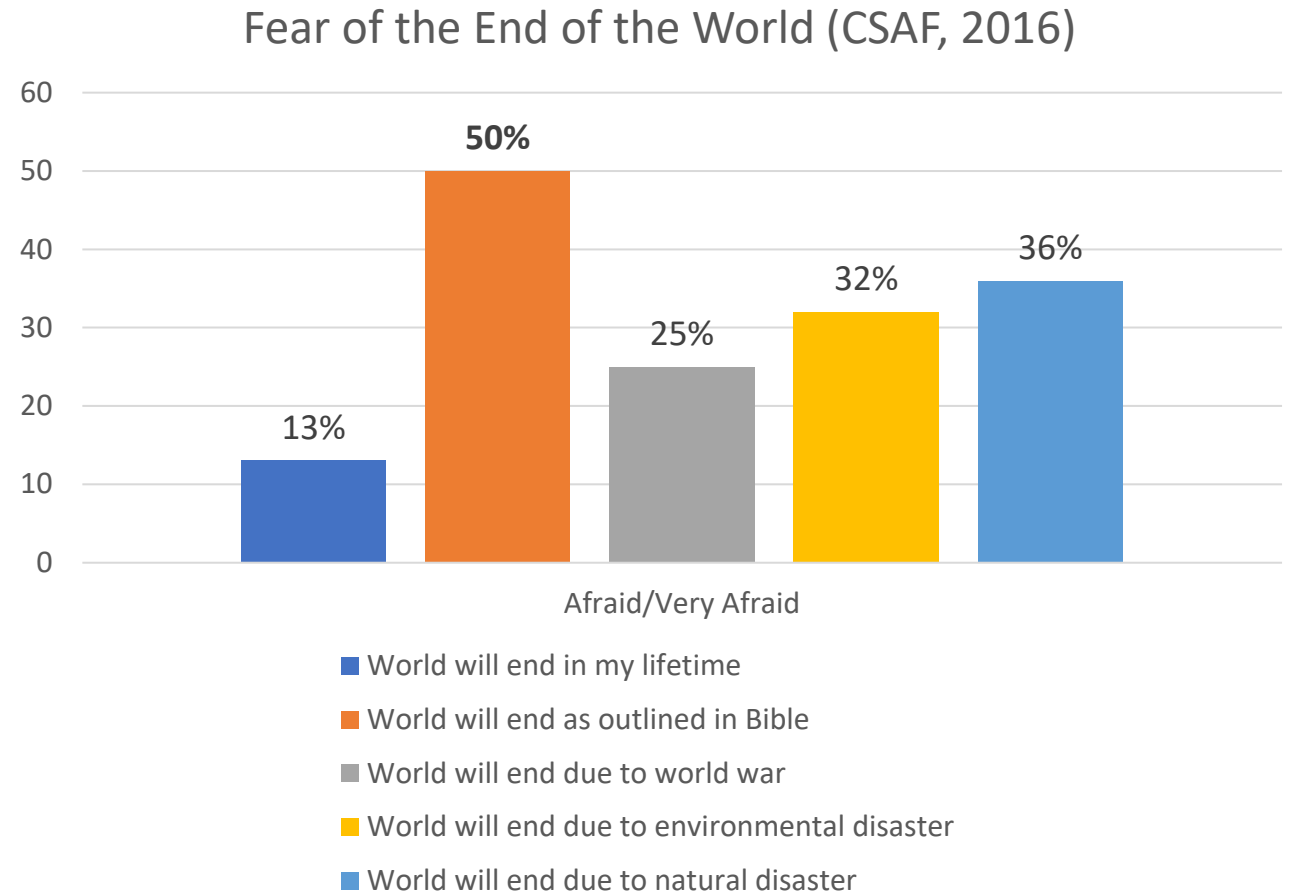
“The feeling of control in an otherwise uncontrollable situation is the key to fear reduction for preppers. A lack of control, as we have seen, is a key driver of fear across a broad list of domains.”



And as we noted in our earlier conversations about religious end of the world beliefs and apocalyptic ideas, the belief that the world will end soon remains a key motivator of end-times beliefs, which includes many preppers who fear the period of “tribulation” before Judgement Day will unleash social and political chaos around the world. As we can also see from the Survey of American Fears, these views are heavily driven by Biblical literalists (50%) who believe everything written in the Bible will come to pass.

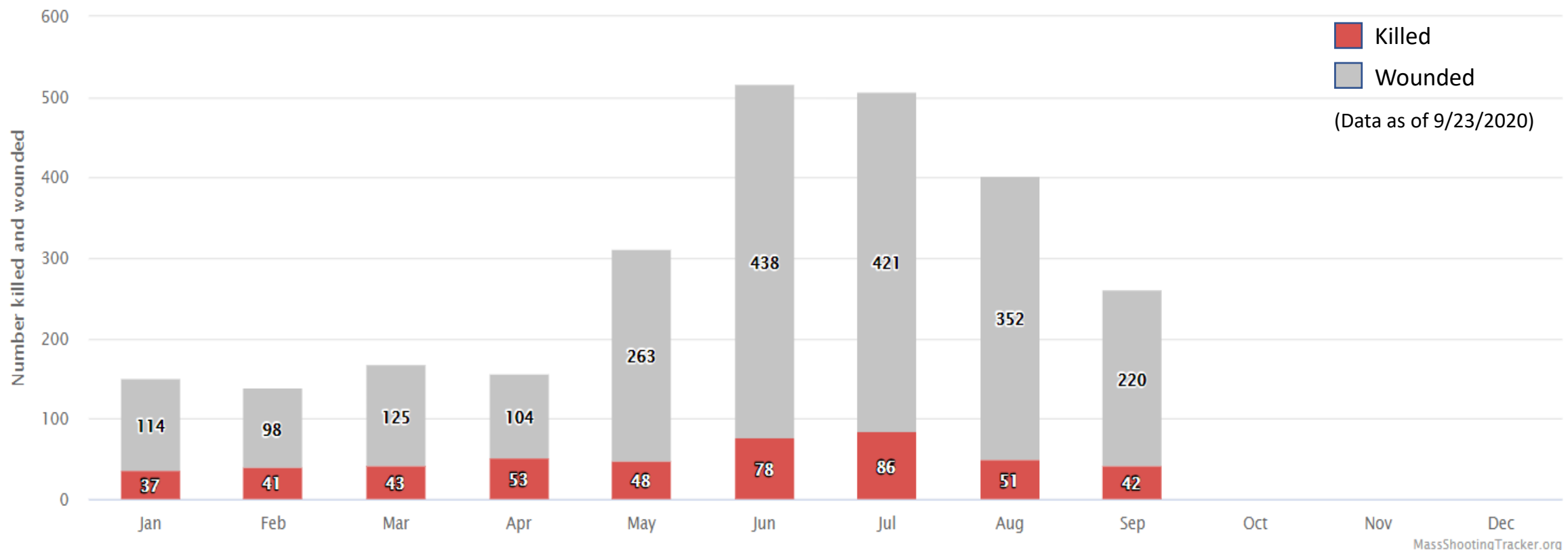


Percentage who believe “the world will end in my lifetime” by religion (CSAF, 2016)



As our scholars note, America in recent years has seen growing fears about mass shootings and political violence (domestic and foreign terrorism), and these fears have been fueled in part by media coverage of these events. As they note, [“The number and severity of terrorist attacks increase with increased press coverage...Scholars have also shown contagion effects \[and “generalized imitation”\] on violence, such that mass killings are more likely to occur within two weeks of another incident.”](#)

U.S. Mass Shootings in 2020



As our authors note, the media coverage of mass shootings and acts of terrorism provide the public visibility that many killers are seeking. In addition, detailed coverage of such events provides more material for future copy-cat killers to draw inspiration from. One response has been the #NoNotoreity movement.

We also know that there is a direct correlation between media consumption and American fears.

- Increased public fears about mass shootings and terrorism related to more media exposure
- Increased fear of crime from watching local TV news
- Mass shooting fears higher on average for both local TV and cable news viewers
- CNN & Fox News viewers more likely to fear being a victim of a mass shooting
- Getting news from social media (Facebook/Twitter) leads to higher mass shooting & terrorism fears
- Watching Fox News, local news & daytime talk TV all lead to greater fears about terrorism

- Women are more afraid than men of being a victim of either terrorism and mass shootings
 - As our authors note, this tracks with what Vulnerability Theory research has found.
- Women are more likely to experience targeted violence (incel terrorism).

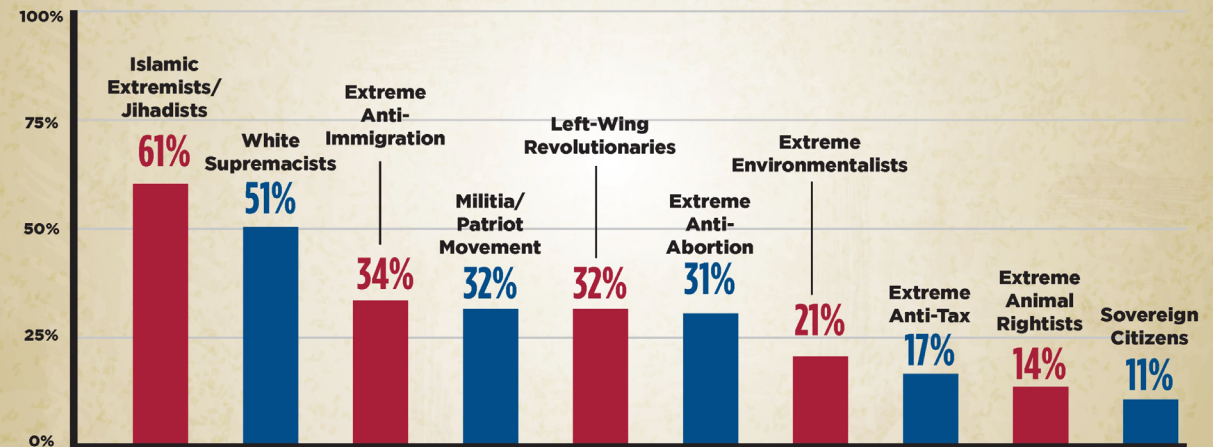
While media framing has an important role to play in causing rising fears in America, even more important are the sources of fears the media promotes, or put differently, who we are told to be fearful of. And as we have seen with other fears, fears over political violence are heavily shaped by partisan news.

Recent Acts of Terror have made me...



* Percent of Americans that agree or strongly agree with the statement. All percentages are rounded.

How afraid are you that the following groups are a threat to national security?



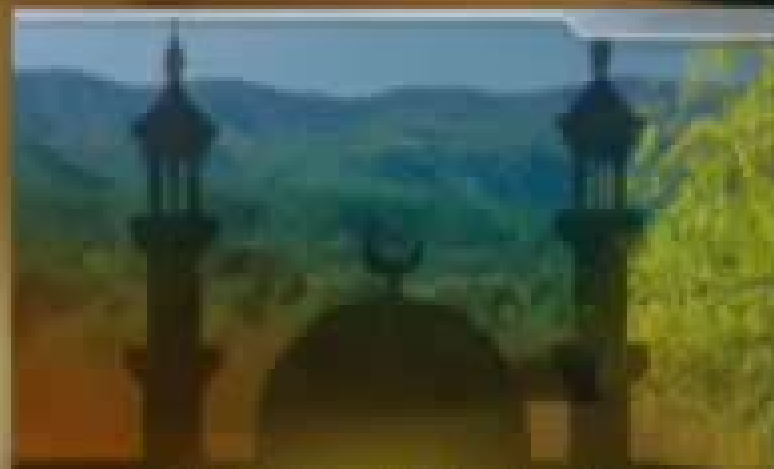
* Percent reporting afraid or very afraid

“There is a long history of fear of and discrimination against Muslims in the United States that can best be understood as a subdimension of racism [and] as a more specific form of xenophobia...In contrast to the framing of violence involving Muslim perpetrators as terrorism, the media framing of events carried out by white, domestic terrorists portrays such episodes as the acts of isolated individuals, hence posing a minimal long-term social threat.”

The authors point out that while there was a small increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric in the aftermath of 9/11, it was not until years later that the persistent efforts of far-right, anti-Muslim fringe groups were able to significantly shift public views towards more anti-Muslim viewpoints. “This move towards more negative media framing resulted in increasing levels of Islamophobia in the United States over time.”

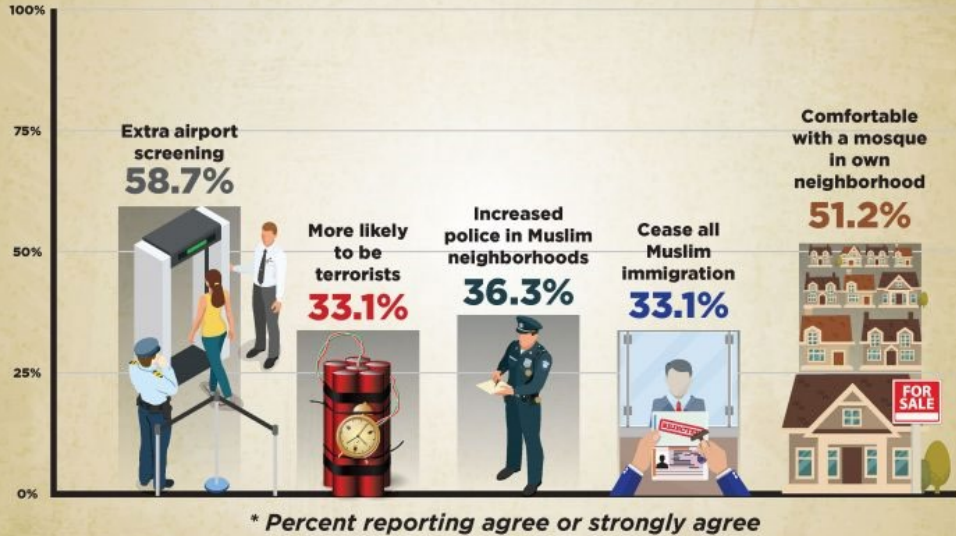
This heightened level of Islamophobia (and xenophobia in general) was a key factor behind the election of Donald Trump in 2016, as his campaign relied on stoking these public fears of “foreigners” to win votes.

As the authors note, “after partisan identification, the strongest predictors of voting for Trump were a measure of Islamophobia and identifying with exclusivist visions of Christian nationalism...not only did Trump’s rhetoric and election incite increasing levels of Islamophobia...playing on such fears was also his ticket to the top of the Republican primary and the presidency in the first place.”



**NOT IN MY
BACKYARD**

Islamophobia: Behaviors Americans Support Due to Fear of Muslims



The Chapman University Survey of American Fears 2016

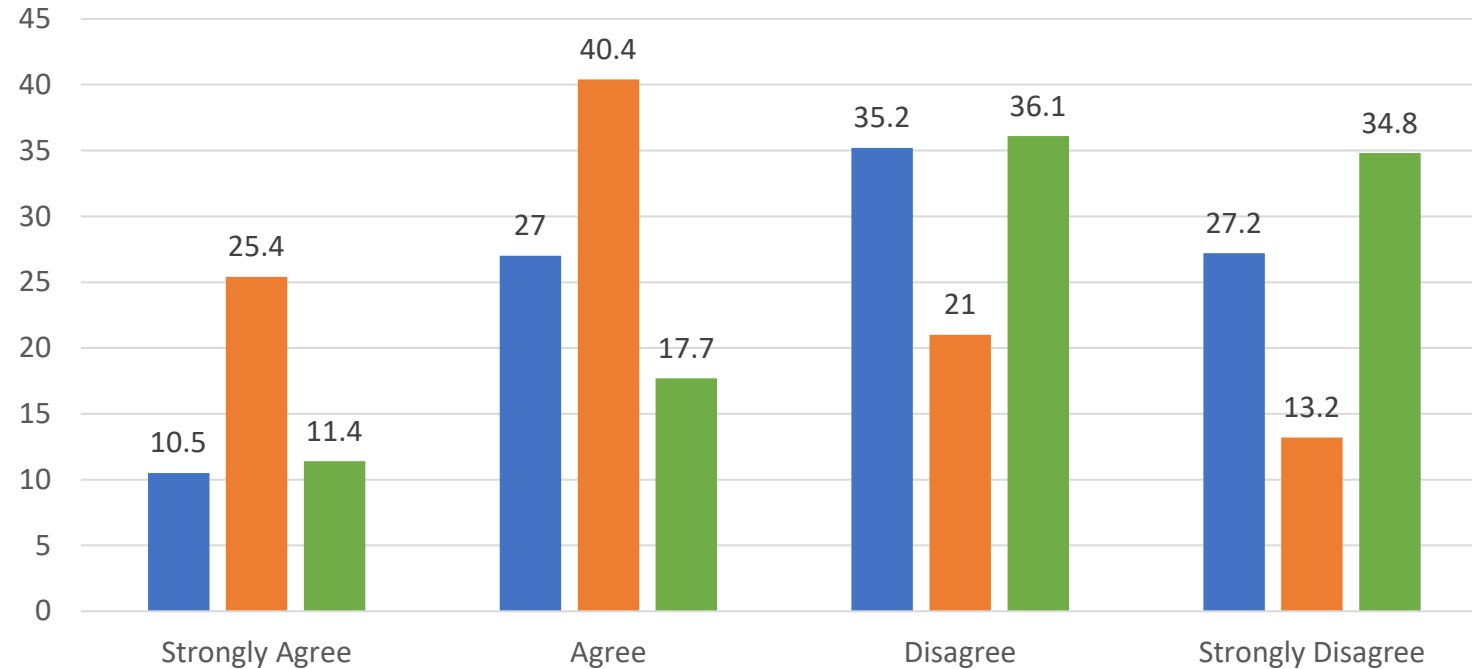
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

37.5%

29.1%

65.8%

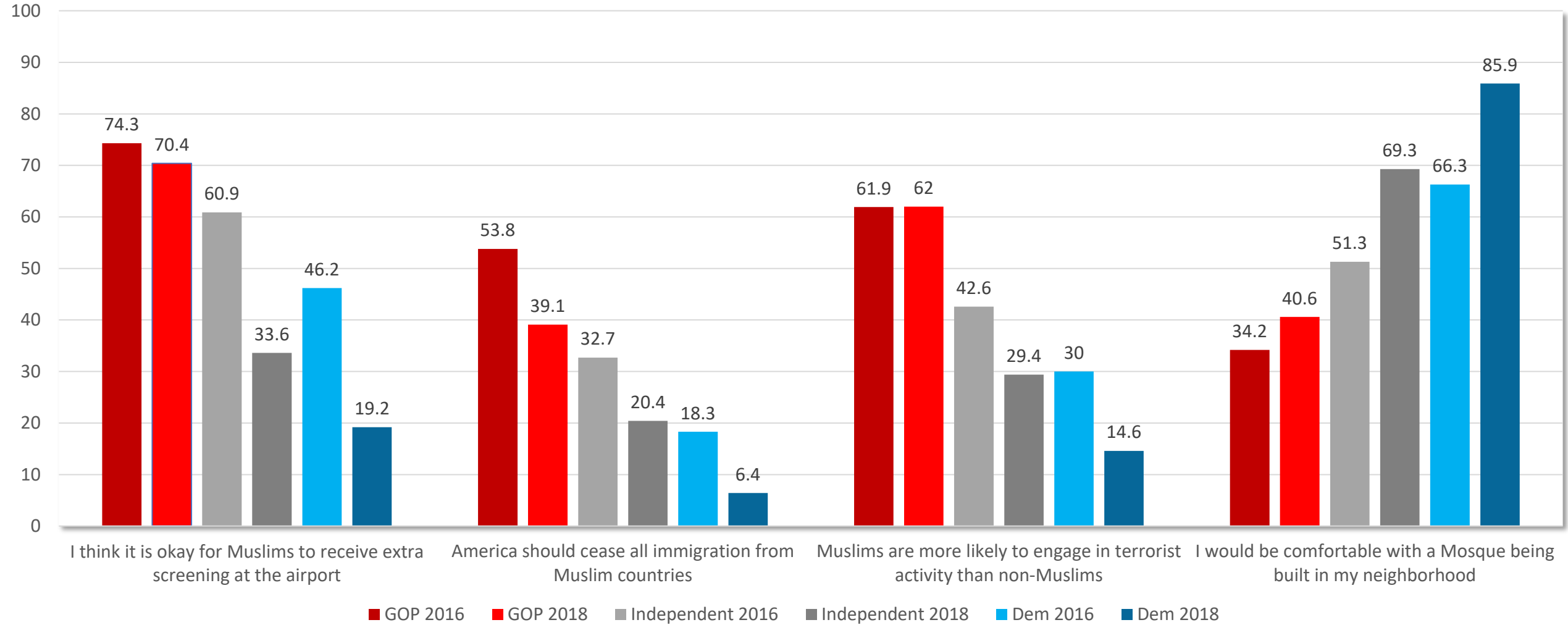
Chapman University Survey of American Fears (2019)



- I think it is ok for Muslims to receive extra screening at the airport
- I would be comfortable with having a Mosque built in my neighborhood
- Muslims are more likely to engage in terrorist activity than non-Muslims

As the authors note, despite efforts to promote anti-Muslim views by Trump and hardline conservatives, “our survey also shows a clear backlash “Trump effect” between 2016 and 2018...we see Islamophobic attitudes declining...among self-described political moderates and liberals.”

Islamophobia: Party Affiliation Differences (2016-2018)



* Percent reporting agree or strongly agree

The US is an international anomaly when it comes to both mass shootings and gun ownership levels, with levels far surpassing any other country on Earth. Americans responded to fears of gun violence by going out and buying more guns while at the same time opposing gun control measures.

“The very same people who are afraid of mass shootings and terrorism are also *more likely to be afraid of gun control*...So rather than media exposure to terrifying events making the public more likely to address the root cause of such events, it actually makes the public less open to meaningful policy changes aimed at reducing the availability of firearms.”

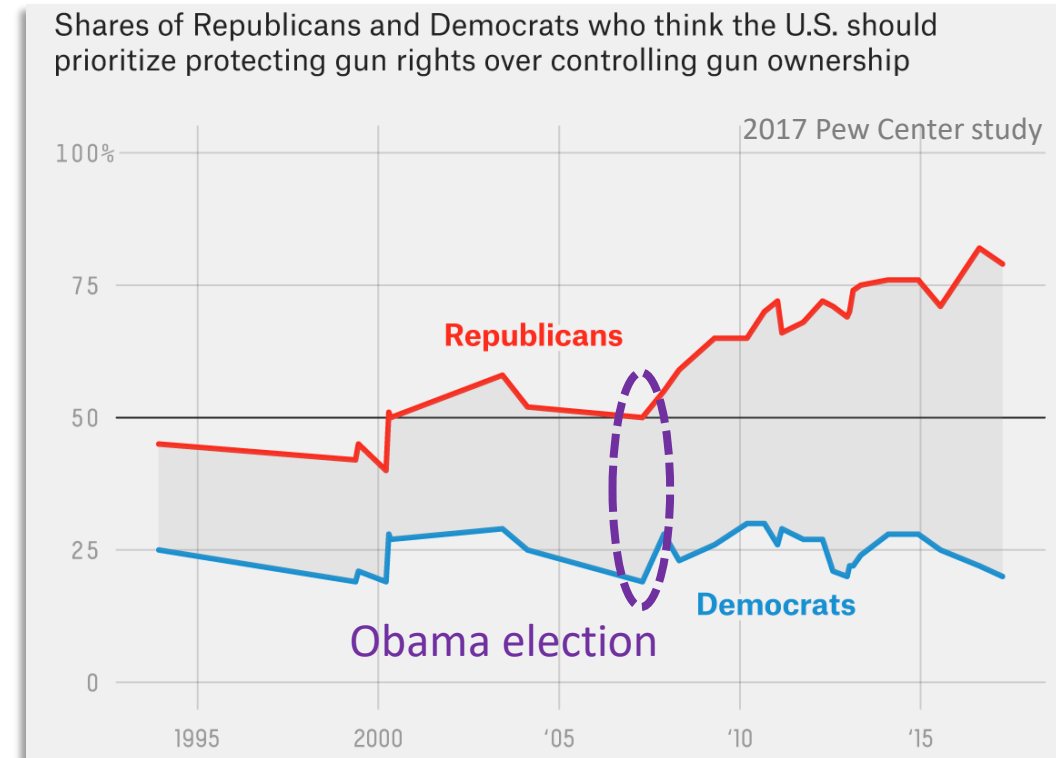
When we talk about American fears around mass shooting and gun violence, we need to think about two effects:

First Stage Effect

Immediate death, injury and trauma on society for victims of violence

Second Stage Effect

Additional negative effects from increasing fears among the public





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 weekly discussion post response. Initial post due Wed, Sept 30 by end of the day, and peer response post due Fri Oct 2 by end of the day.