

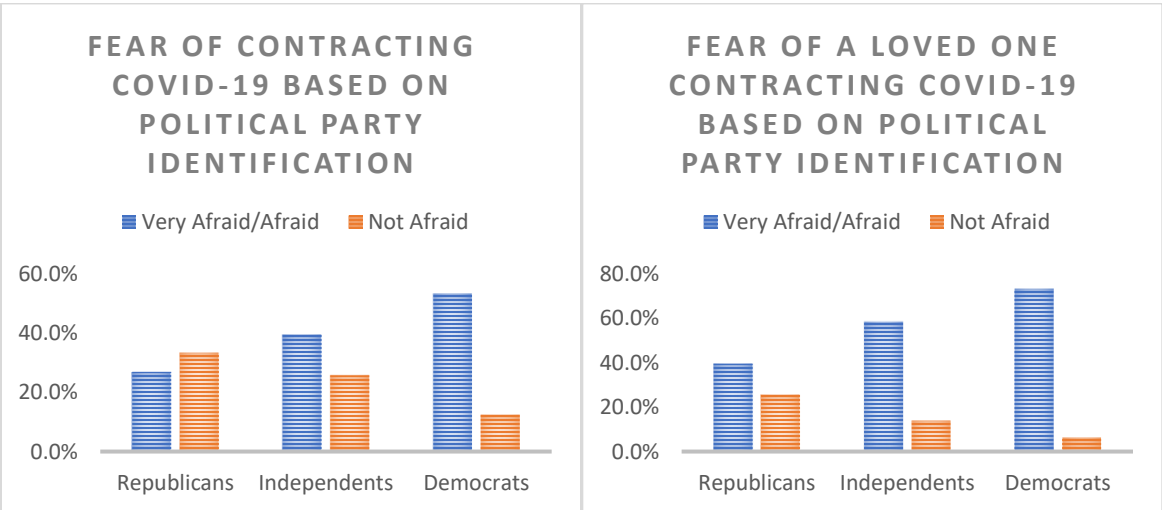
# FEAR OF COVID-19 in the United States

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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the health of millions across the globe and uprooted ordinary life for everyone. At this point in the United States, a majority people know someone who has or has had the coronavirus. According to the 2020/2021 Chapman University Survey of American Fears (CSAF)<sup>1</sup>, 79.2% of respondents know someone personally who has had COVID-19, while 7.9% of all respondents reported they themselves have had COVID-19. Fear levels about the coronavirus for individuals are influenced by a variety of factors such as news source, political party, and economic situation.

## General Fear of Contracting COVID-19

Table 1



*The Chapman University Survey on American Fears 2020/2021*  
n=1035

There is a stark political divide regarding fear of contracting COVID-19. Self-identified Democrats are more fearful of contracting the virus, whereas Republicans are less afraid. According to the survey, roughly a quarter (27%) of Republicans are very afraid/afraid of contracting COVID-19 while about half (53.4%) of Democrats are. On the flip side, 33.3% of self-identified Republicans and 12.5% of Democrats are not afraid of contracting the coronavirus. A clear partisan trend is evident; Democrats are more fearful than Republicans are. This pattern is not only visible with fears of oneself contracting COVID-19, but it extends to fear for loved ones as well.

<sup>1</sup> Because the survey was fielded at the start of 2021 (Jan 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>), we have used 2020/2021 in the title.

Some 39.6% of Republicans are very afraid/afraid of a loved one contracting the virus, while almost three fourths (73.1%) of Democrats are. Very similarly, a quarter (25.5%) of Republicans and 6.4% of Democrats are not afraid of a loved one contracting COVID-19. Not only are these partisan trends similar but they show respondents are more afraid of their loved ones contracting the virus than themselves becoming sick with COVID-19. For Democrats, Independents, and Republicans the percentages of those very afraid/afraid of a loved one contracting the coronavirus are consistently higher than the individual fear of each respondent contracting COVID-19. Also, for both personal contraction and that of a loved one, Independents' fear falls in between Democrats and Republicans.

**Economic Impact of COVID-19**

Not only are respondents afraid of contracting the virus or loved ones becoming sick, some noted fears of unemployment due to the struggling economy. Over a quarter of all respondents (26.3%) said they are very afraid/afraid of losing their job due to COVID-19 even though only 7.4% of respondents have lost their jobs or been permanently laid off.

As with fear of contraction, a similar partisan divide is evident. Some 20.6% of Republicans, 28.6% of Independents and 29% of Democrats are very afraid/afraid of losing their job due to COVID-19. While the percentages between the different party identifications are narrower in comparison to the previous fear of contracting the coronavirus, the pattern of Republicans having less fear than Independents and Democrats, respectively, of COVID-19 affecting their lives continues. It should be noted between Democrats and Independents, more Independents are very afraid, but more Democrats are afraid of losing their job. Like before, the inverse stands mostly true with 69.7% of Republicans, 51.3% of Independents and 57.1% of Democrats are not afraid of losing their job due to COVID-19.

Additionally, the direct economic impact on individuals due to the pandemic plays a part in determining respondents' fear levels of contracting the coronavirus. To illustrate, 65.7% of respondents who lost their jobs or were permanently laid off due to COVID-19 are very afraid /afraid of contracting the virus whereas only 37.9% of respondents who did not lose their jobs or were not permanently laid off as a result of COVID-19 are very afraid/afraid of contraction.

**Fear of COVID-19 Impacted by News Source**

**CNN/FOX/MSNBC**

**Table 2: Fear of Contracting COVID-19 by Media Preference**

	<b>CNN</b>	<b>FOX</b>	<b>MSNBC</b>
Very Afraid	35.4%	25.7%	39.7%
Afraid	29.1%	10.8%	21.9%
Slightly Afraid	26.6%	43.2%	20.5%

Not Afraid 8.9% 20.3% 17.8%

*The Chapman University Survey on American Fears 2020/2021*

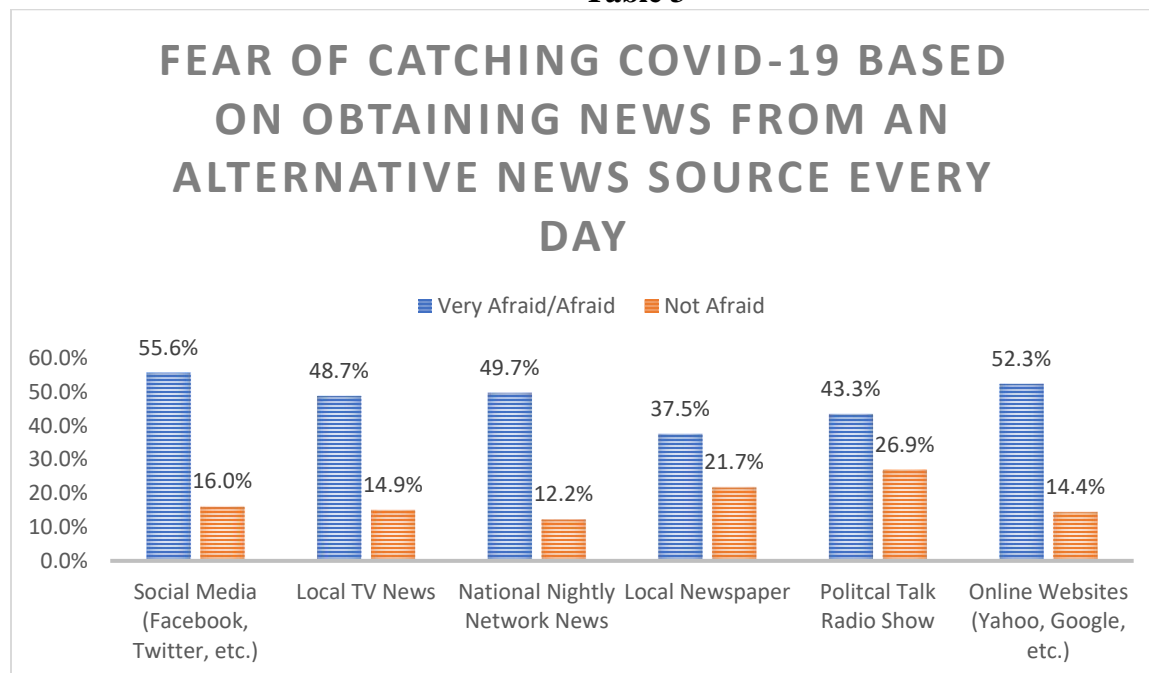
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Table 2 shows the degree of fear respondents have of contracting COVID-19 based on watching one of the three (CNN, FOX, MSNBC) news sources every day. The fear levels are broken down into four categories: Very Afraid, Afraid, Slightly Afraid and Not Afraid.

Partisanship is not the only variable affecting respondents' fear of the coronavirus. News source plays an integral part in how afraid or not afraid one may be of COVID-19. For example, 36.5% of respondents who watch Fox News every day are very afraid/afraid of contracting COVID-19 while 64.5% of respondents who watch CNN every day and 61.6% of respondents who watch MSNBC every day are very afraid/afraid of contracting the coronavirus. These data complement the partisan patterns laid out earlier when it is considered Fox News viewership tends to skew more conservative/Republican while CNN and MSNBC tend to lean more liberal/Democrat. What we know from the survey data as presented in table 2 is there is a partisan difference over fear of the coronavirus, so the pattern continues with conservative and liberal leaning news stations. A similar, yet not identical, trend is when viewership decreases. For those who watch Fox News once or twice a week 44.1%, CNN 57.9%, and MSNBC 46.9% are very afraid/afraid of contracting COVID-19. While Fox News viewers are still the least fearful of the three news channels, MSNBC and Fox News viewers have more similar fear levels when consumption is once or twice a week than when viewership is every day.

### Alternative News Sources

**Table 3**



*The Chapman University Survey on American Fears 2020/2021*  
n=1035

Other forms of news besides FOX, CNN, and MSNBC play a role into respondent's degree of fear for contracting COVID-19. Of the other news sources (social media, local news television, national nightly news networks, local newspaper, talk radio shows about politics, and online news websites like Google and Yahoo) tested, those who get their news from social media every day (55.6%) are the most fearful (very afraid/afraid) of contracting the coronavirus. Conversely, only 37.5% of those who read a local newspaper every day are very afraid/afraid of contracting the virus.

Furthermore, fear is impacted when viewership is less frequent. For example, when respondents view an alternative news source once or twice a week instead of every day, those who have the highest fear of contracting COVID-19 are those who get their news from a local newspaper (46.9% Very Afraid/Afraid). On the contrary, only 31.1% of respondents who get their news from social media once or twice a week are very afraid/afraid of contracting COVID-19, the lowest of the group. It is interesting to note when viewership decreases from every day to once or twice a week, respondents, who obtain news from social media and local newspapers, fear levels flip.

Fear levels regarding personal contraction and loved ones catching the coronavirus fluctuate depending on a number of factors. Overall, respondents are more afraid of loved ones catching the coronavirus than themselves. Furthermore, fear of COVID-19 can increase or decrease depending on how directly impacted someone's economic situation is. With respect to partisanship, the survey reveals Democrats with the highest fear levels, Republicans with the lowest, and Independents in the middle. Not only do CNN, FOX, and MSNBC play a role in one's fear of the coronavirus, but so do alternative news sources.