

Most Americans Are Worried About Losing Their Housing

Some 75 percent of Americans fear they would lose their homes in a crisis, such as a job loss.

KRISTON CAPPS



Damian Dovarganes/AP

Neither the Democratic nor the Republican campaigns for the White House have focused on housing as a national appeal to voters. Only Tim Kaine, the Democratic candidate for vice president, has had [much to say on the topic](#). It's too bad the issue hasn't found more purchase in this election: Housing anxiety ranks as maybe the biggest problem affecting the most Americans that [neither presidential candidate has addressed](#) in any prominent way.

Last week, a new poll showed just how far this anxiety reaches in the U.S. According to a survey by the [NHP Foundation](#), 75 percent of Americans are worried they could lose their homes, while 83 percent of respondents said that they were concerned about the rising costs of housing.

Some 30 percent of the respondents described themselves as “very concerned” that they or a close friend or relative could lose their housing, meaning that nearly one-third of Americans feels that a lack of affordable housing could represent a personal crisis. Another 27 percent described themselves as “concerned” —meaning more than half of respondents consider housing instability to be a looming danger.

Per the poll, about 40 percent of respondents say that they fear they could lose their homes due to job loss. This fear is not unfounded. Neil Gabler’s [May cover story for *The Atlantic*](#) cites Federal Reserve Board data that showed that almost half of U.S. households (47 percent) could not muster \$400 in an emergency. A [report by the Urban Institute](#) shows that more than one-third of all American families (36 percent) have savings of less than \$250. One-quarter of U.S. households have no savings at all.

With so many families living paycheck to paycheck, it is no surprise that housing anxiety is so prevalent. Yet solutions to the housing affordability crisis are not necessarily popular with voters. One solution is to build, baby, build, which could help reduce rental costs in cities with high demand. The NFP Foundation survey finds that 65 percent of Americans pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing, meaning they are cost burdened.

We all want more affordable housing, except when it involves changes to the places we live.

Another answer is to supply more-affordable housing for the households struggling most with the rent. [Not one county in the U.S.](#) has enough affordable housing to help its most vulnerable residents. But public-housing and affordable-housing initiatives are often met with resistance from communities. So is market-rate housing.

The NHP Foundation finds that 80 percent of its respondents (1,000 Americans polled nationwide) say that they would welcome affordable housing in their communities. But affordable housing is rarely if ever posed to residents or voters as an up-or-down, yes-or-no question: "Would you like more affordable housing?" Sure, we all would. Except when it involves changes to the places where we live; then our neighbors flip out about it.

The reality is that, barring some catastrophic national nosedive, 75 percent of Americans aren't going to lose their homes. But a majority of American families aren't developing a savings safety net, and excessive housing costs are one of the reasons why. It falls on Congress to take action to restore the [housing aid that has evaporated due to deadlock](#).

There is only so much that any president can do to make housing great again. But the problems that prevent wider adoption of affordable housing and market-rate construction tie to the broader trends in the national election—namely, [fear and loathing](#).