

Americans Cite Cyberterrorism Among Top Three Threats to U.S.

CRITICAL THREAT TO VITAL INTERESTS OF
THE U.S. IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS

CYBERTERRORISM

73%

GALLUP POLL, FEB. 3-7

by Justin McCarthy

Story Highlights

- *International terrorism, nuclear weapons in Iran also top list*
- *Democrats far more likely to view global warming as "critical"*
- *Dems, GOP about equally likely to view cyberterrorism as "critical"*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As President Barack Obama rolls out a proposal to increase U.S. cybersecurity funding, Americans view cyberterrorism as a leading threat to U.S. vital interests in the next 10 years. U.S. adults rank cyberterrorism (73%) along with international terrorism (79%) and development of nuclear weapons by Iran (75%) as the highest of a dozen potential threats.

Critical Threats to the United States

I am going to read you a list of possible threats to the vital interests of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please tell me if you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat or not an important threat at all?

	% Critical threat	% Important but not critical threat
International terrorism	79	18
Development of nuclear weapons by Iran	75	18
Cyberterrorism, the use of computers to cause disruption or fear in society	73	22
The spread of infectious diseases throughout the world	63	33
The conflict in Syria	58	32
The military power of North Korea	58	29
Large numbers of refugees trying to come to Europe and North America	52	32
Global warming or climate change	50	28
The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians	45	41
The military power of China	41	46
The economic power of China	41	45
The military power of Russia	39	47

Feb. 3-7, 2016

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In prior years, Americans have been most likely to identify international terrorism, which is down slightly from last year's 84%, and development of nuclear weapons by Iran as critical threats to the U.S. This is the first year Gallup has asked about cyberterrorism, defined in the poll as "the use of computers to cause disruption or fear in society."

In the Feb. 3-7 Gallup poll, 63% of U.S. adults consider the spread of infectious diseases throughout the world a critical threat. This comes as the first known case of Zika virus transmission in the U.S. was discovered in Texas, after many confirmed infections throughout the world. After this poll was conducted, Obama announced his intention to request additional emergency funding to combat Zika in the U.S.

The majority of Americans also see the military power of North Korea (58%) as a critical threat. On Sunday, the last day of the poll's field period, North Korea launched a rocket that illustrated the country's improvements in its missile technology.

Similarly, 58% of Americans name the conflict in Syria as a critical threat to the U.S., and a majority (52%) express concern over the potential of large numbers of refugees attempting to enter Europe and North America. Views of these threats as "critical" come as the conflict in Syria rages on, and the

question of whether the U.S. would take in Syrian refugees has been hotly discussed in the 2016 presidential campaign.

Some of the issues perceived as less threatening are global warming or climate change (50% say it is a critical threat), the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (45%), the military power and, separately, the economic power of China (both 41%), and the military power of Russia (39%). The percentage rating Russia's military power as a critical threat is down 10 points from last year as the Russia-Ukraine conflict has become less of a U.S. flashpoint.

Partisan Differences Small on Cyberterrorism, Infectious Diseases

Republicans and Democrats, including independents who lean toward each party, differ considerably in their assessments of what constitutes a critical threat to the vital interests of the U.S. Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are much more likely to categorize most issues as a "critical threat."

The largest gap exists on the issue of global warming or climate change, which three in four Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents describe as a "critical threat," while only one in four Republicans and GOP leaners agree. Conversely, Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (70%) are nearly twice as likely as Democrats and Democratic leaners (37%) to view the issue of refugees entering Europe and North America in large numbers as a "critical threat."

On a couple of issues, however, the differences between the two groups are negligible. When asked about cyberterrorism, about three-quarters of both Democrats and Republicans view the issue as a "critical threat." Similarly, seven percentage points separate the views of the two party groups on the issue of infectious diseases.

Critical Threats to the United States -- According to Democrats, Republicans

	Republicans+ Republican leaners	Democrats+ Democratic leaners	Difference (Republicans/leaners minus Democrats/leaners)
	% Critical threat	% Critical threat	(pct. pts.)
Global warming or climate change	25	75	-50
The spread of infectious diseases throughout the world	59	66	-7
Cyberterrorism, the use of computers to cause disruption or fear in society	77	72	5
The military power of Russia	44	34	10
The conflict in Syria	64	54	10
International terrorism	86	74	12
The economic power of China	48	34	14
The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians	53	38	15
The military power of North Korea	67	51	16
The military power of China	49	33	16
Development of nuclear weapons by Iran	87	66	21
Large numbers of refugees trying to come to Europe and North America	70	37	33

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Bottom Line

Given the spate of news on the fronts of international terrorism, cyberterrorism and nuclear weapons negotiations with Iran, it's perhaps unsurprising that these issues are at the forefront of Americans' concerns about potential threats to the U.S. over the next 10 years. And the president's high-profile efforts -- for example, his *Wall Street Journal* op-ed on cyberterrorism Tuesday -- align with the importance Americans place on such issues.

But an issue's prominence might be less of a factor in Americans' assessments than the seriousness of its consequences if it should happen. In the past year alone, Americans have seen the ramifications of the Paris terrorist attacks and of Chinese hackers' infiltration of U.S. federal government data.

Of course, Republicans and Democrats often don't agree about what constitutes a "critical" threat to the vital interests of the U.S. Still, for lawmakers, Americans' widespread agreement on issues such as cyberterrorism and infectious diseases may provide a welcome opening for bipartisan agreement and progress on issues whose importance has broad public consensus.

Historical data are available in [Gallup Analytics](#).

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted Feb. 3-7, 2016, with a random sample of 1,021 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 60% cellphone respondents and 40% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

[View survey methodology, complete question responses and trends.](#)

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